# They Work Hard for Their Money: A Narrative Analysis of Millennial Workforce Entry

By



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## Abstract

In 2015, the Millennial generation (adults ages 18 to 34 in 2015) surpassed Gen-X (35-50 in 2015) as the largest age cohort in the workforce (Fry, 2015). Millennials introduced unprecedented changes in the demographic makeup of the American population for employers to consider. They are more racially diverse than any other cohort. Moreover, Millennials grew up in the digital age, thus they have a higher level of comfort with technology than any other generation. As the youngest part of the millennial population grows older, more will be looking for full-time employment, and thus the proportion of the labor force for this cohort will only increase (Fry, 2015). Millennials are often portrayed as upper-middle class and white, despite the reality that this generation is more racially diverse than any other and only one third of Millennials have post-secondary education.

This portrayal of Millennials is a part of a dominant narrative that relies on stereotypes that are primarily based on upper-middle class work. This thesis investigates the ways in which the dominant narrative is reified and challenged by Millennial workers in full-time positions. Particularly, I was interested in the socialization processes experienced by first-time Millennial employees in full-time positions from both blue and white collar industries. Using Jablin's (1987) model of Organizational Assimilation, this study is primarily focused on the bridge between vocational/organizational anticipatory socialization and the encounter phases proposed within this theory. Using narrative analysis, data was collected using semi-structured interviews with members of the Millennial workforce within the first five years of full-time employment. Interviews revealed the ways in which Millennial experiences reinforce, challenge and/or transform the dominant narrative of the Millennial worker.


Keywords: Millennials; First-time workers; Organizational Assimilation;

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## Chapter One: Introduction & Rationale

Millennials. The buzzword of the 21st century in business and research surrounding all forms of business discourses. Organizational communication is no exception. Practitioners and scholars alike are fascinated with this unique rising generation for which we already know a great deal. In 2015, the Millennial generation (adults ages 18 to 34 in 2015) surpassed Gen-X (35-50 in 2015) as the largest age cohort in the workforce (Fry, 2015). Pew Research (Fry, 2015) reports "more than one-in-three American workers today are Millennials." Not only are Millennials the largest share of the American workforce, they had not yet peaked – a large portion of Millennials (in 2015) were 18- to 24- years old, the typical age a person would attend university. As post-secondary education becomes more essential for long-term employment in the U.S. knowledge based economy, approximately one third (Patten & Fry, 2015) of this population was still enrolled in higher education. Thus, participation in the workforce for this youngest portion of the millennial population is suppressed. As the youngest part of the millennial population grows older, more of them will be looking for full-time employment, and thus the proportion of the labor force for this cohort will only increase (Fry, 2015). In addition to this surge in the workforce, Millennials also demonstrate other interesting trends not found in any other generation.

The Millennial generation introduced unprecedented changes in the demographic makeup of the American population. They are more ethnically and racially diverse than any other cohort. Moreover, Millennials tend to be more politically active than any other age cohort (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). Finally, Millennials grew up in the digital age, thus they have a higher level of comfort with technology than any other generation. Each of these trends will be explored in detail below.

Millennials are the most ethnically and racially diverse cohort to date in the United Sates (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). In an analysis of the demographics of this generation, Pew Research (Keeter & Taylor, 2009) reported that, "18.5% are Hispanic; 14.2% are black; 4.3% are Asian; 3.2% are mixed race or other; and 59.8%, a record low, are white." The White House (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2014) report on The Millennials found that nearly 15% of Millennials were born in a foreign country. Moreover, The White House (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2014) reported, "the share of those age 15 to 34 who identify as non-Hispanic white fell 20 percentage points from 1980 to 2012, while the share reporting Hispanic ancestry tripled." The ethnic and racial diversity of this generation will influence the ways this generation behaves and communicates within organizations as they will be learning to adapt to the various backgrounds of their peers.

The second trend already known about Millennials is they are more politically progressive than any other modern generation (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). The 2016 election is the first year in which the Millennial voting population will be equal to the Baby Boomer population (Thompson, 2016). This young cohort gave more overwhelming support to a democratic candidate when they voted at 66%-32% in the Barak Obama vs. John McCain race in 2008 (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). They are not only voting for more liberal politicians, they are demanding for a more liberal society; in particular, they are more liberal on three issues than their parents are—gay rights, immigration, and marijuana (Thompson, 2016). Moreover, Millennials are activists. As a generation they are more suspicious of corporate and for-profit establishments than previous generations, and therefore, are ready to be the social justice warriors to call for a moral rebirth in America (Thompson, 2016). A generation of activist

employees is sure to influence the workforce in terms of both the types of jobs these individuals will take, as well as the ways in which they conduct themselves in the workplace.

Third, technology and digital communication is regarded as everyday behavior by Millennials and a seamless part of their social lives. Millennials are more likely to use computer-mediated-communication to keep in contact with their friends and family than any other generation (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2014). Social networking websites give people the tools they need to communicate more easily than ever before. People can interact with one another synchronously and asynchronously transcending time and location (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010). Pew Research (2014) found that 81% of Millennials have and use a Facebook account. As "digital natives," Millennials are the first generation in which these technologies are not something new to which they have to adapt (Pew Research Center, 2014).

These are just a few trends identified to describe the uniqueness of the Millennial generation. However, what is missing from these trends is that a majority of the Millennial generation – two-thirds to be precise- do not hold a post-secondary educational degree. Not earning a four-year degree is costlier for Millennials than any previous generation. An economic analysis by the Pew Research Center (2014) found that full-time workers between ages of 25-32 with a four-year degree earn $17,500 more annually than their high school diploma holding peers. The report goes on to say that it is more difficult now than in previous generations for a high school graduates to maintain a middle class income. Despite the wage gap amongst education levels being higher than ever, little research has explored the influence of social class on the workforce for Millennials. Thus this study will contribute to the understanding of Millennial workers by analyzing the experiences of both white and blue collar working millennials. This analysis examines the intersection of age and social class, by considering two

types of work: text work and body work (Dougherty, 2011) for Millennial workers. Not only will an analysis of Millennial workers' experiences provide for insightful knowledge for organizational communication scholars, it will also be valuable to employers to better understand the needs and wants of their newest and largest cohort of employees.

Organizational Assimilation provides a helpful theoretical framework to explain people's transitions as an employee joins a new organization. As proposed by Jablin (1987), there are four phases individuals experience as they join an organization: Anticipatory socialization, Encounter, Metamorphosis, and Exit. To gain a better understanding of the differences in the process of becoming a full-time employee for white and blue collar Millennial workers, I will focus on the Anticipatory socialization and encounter phases of this model. This study is interested in the workforce entry narratives of Millennial workers across social class lines. Thus, organizational socialization provides the appropriate model needed to explain and understand the process of workforce entry.

Given the unique attributes of the Millennial generation, it is likely they experience work in unprecedented ways. Therefore, the aim of this study is to better understand the employment narratives of millennials. Much of the current discourse frames the experiences of Millennials in the workforce in stereotypical and stigmatizing ways. Thus, to counter this hegemonic master narrative, this study will use narrative methodology to explore the lived experiences of entry and junior-level millennial employees across social class lines.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Defining Age

Age, in most cultures, creates certain expectations and ideas about how people should act. Social hierarchy is often based on age. Allen (2011) writes, "an age based social hierarchy helps

to organize social and economic life. Age permits entry into and exit from certain status positions" (p. 162). Age is the predetermining factor whether or not a person can be employed. If they are not at a minimum of a working age, then they are not permitted to be a part of the workforce. Moreover, once a person reaches a certain age, typically 65 in the US, they are expected to leave the workforce. Thus, age is incorporated into the structure and systems of control embedded into the workforce. While age may be a universal social identity because it happens across race, gender, and socioeconomic status, it is not experienced by all people the same way. Conversely, as these individuals age, they are more likely to continue working past retirement age. Allen (2011) concludes, "Age distinctions matter because members of social identity groups who have been privileged throughout their lives tend to continue to reap benefits as they have, just as those who have been oppressed usually continue to suffer" (p. 164).

One of the most common general age distinction used to categorize society is by generation, or birth cohorts. A birth cohort is "a grouping of people born during a specific span of years" and is significant social construction related to age (Allen, 2011, p. 169). Because members of a birth cohort tend to share experiences and social circumstances, we often assume that they share behavioral and attitudinal similarities, especially in the workplace. To better understand how these assumptions about cohorts are formed, this section will further explain the different cohorts currently part of the workforce. Three birth cohorts currently dominate the work force—Baby Boomers, Gen-X, and Millennials.

Baby Boomers were born between 1946 – 1964 and are generally characterized in the work place as, "Hard working to a fault; competitive; largely respectful of chain of command; good at teamwork within a stable hierarchical structure" (Rentz, 2015, p. 144). Next, Gen-Xers were born between 1965 – 1980. Rentz described Gen-Xer's traits as, "impatient with traditional

ways of doing things; skeptical; prefer to work alone; want to learn and grow professionally, not just advance" (144). Finally, Millennials are the third and largest birth cohort in the workforce. Millennials include those that were born after 1980 and fell between ages 18 and 34 in 2015. Based on a review of popular and academic sources, Rentz (2015) provided the following summary of general traits of Millennials:

> "Want work/life balance and a job that's meaningful and interesting; expect to rise quickly and change companies often; confident in their opinions and expect them to be valued by their superiors; need and want extensive guidance and praise; focused on the here and now and unaware of the larger picture; expect to work in teams; the most tech-savvy generation (shaped by the Internet, social media, and video games)" (p. 144).

Even though Millennials (and other cohorts) are often framed in terms of their differences, there are a few similarities amongst these groups. Baby Boomers and Millennials both value teamwork to accomplish work tasks (Rentz, 2015). Additionally, both of these groups have higher levels of women in the work force than any other birth cohorts (Pew Research, 2014). As for Gen-X and Millennials, they both value work/lifebalance, although what work/lifebalance means and looks like varies between the two generations. Being comfortable with the use of technology is also a shared characteristic between these two generations. So, while it may be easy to focus on the ways in which these generations diverge, it is also useful to recognize that similarities do exist.

However, when focusing solely on the general traits of Millennials, they are more often portrayed as negative, especially when it comes to Millennials in the workplace. Due to this negative perspective, Millennials are often accused of laziness, apathy, and lack commitment

(Lyons, 2016). This dominant narrative of being a "Millennial" is so strong, that many Millennials do not even want to identify as a Millennial to avoid the stigma.

Erving Goffman (1963) wrote about stigma in terms of a social identity, which is particularly useful for the stigma experienced by Millennials. For Goffman, stigma refers to "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p. 3). To further understand the implications for a person with a stigmatized identity Goffman explains:

> "An individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us. He possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated (p. 5)."

Being categorized as a Millennial in the workplace is an increasingly stigmatized identity. A quick search of popular press will show results of all the negative stereotypes that follow Millennials into the workforce. They are accused of being entitled, lazy job-hoppers that know all there is to know about all and any technology (Gani, 2016; Graham, 2013;). While studies like Rentz (2015) have found these stereotypes to be untrue once Millennials are employed, the stigma of being a Millennial could prevent individuals from being employed, if the stigma overrides the other identities a person possesses, as Goffman claims. For Millennials, their entire generation is stigmatized due to stereotypes associated with their age.

Like any other birth cohort, members of the Millennial generation will share common experiences and general traits, some of these traits are given more attention than others. For Millennials, the most popular traits type cast the Millennial as middle to upper class white collar and Anglo-American. Thus, when conversations and studies about Millennials are brought forward, they further the dominant narrative that is not fully representative of who Millennials

are. However, for the majority of Millennials, these descriptors are not accurate or authentic to their lived experiences. The next section will further explore the classed experiences of Millennials.

**Social Class and Millennial Experiences**

Social class is defined in a myriad of ways – income level, type of work, education, etc. Marvin (1994, 1995) gives a useful and inclusive definition of how professions can be understood among social class lines. Rather than using income as the deciding factor, she focuses on how the body is used in relation to the work. The Text Class includes are those professions that are primarily focused on using a person's ability to interact with various types of texts: lawyers, academics, inside sales, would all qualify as text class. Text work is documented and includes the continual creation and revision of texts (Dougherty, 2011). The alternative to text work then, is body work (Dougherty, 2011). These are the jobs that primarily rely on a person's body to complete the work: welders, construction, massage therapist, cosmetologist, all rely on the body to complete the work. Marvin (1995) claims that the body class "is the emblem of those without textual credentials, whose bodies are available to be used up by society and whose powers of social participation derive from whatever value their bodies have for cultural muscle work" (p. 103). Thus, because our society places less value on work which relies on the body rather than the mind, those workers are placed in a lower social status than the text working peers (Dougherty, 2011). In US society, more value is given to work that relies on texts, or traditional conceptions of intellect. Those of the textual class (Marvin, 2006) are privileged by their skills of using and producing texts. Moreover, this class is entitled to shield and protect their bodies from physical hardship and danger. Thus, for the purposes of this study, when referring to blue collar workers, I will be defining those occupations in terms of the utilization of

the body, as Marvin does for body class. Alternatively, Marvin's conception of text class will be used to define white collar work. Using these definitions is more useful in describing the type of work done in these two work categories, and thus provides a better way to differentiate the two rather than using income, social class, or industry standards as the criteria.

One of the misconceptions in the discourse about Millennials is they are often stereotyped as upper-middle class, white collar workers (and typically racially white). Hannah Ewens (2016) pointed out this narrative in popular press, stating this is problematic because "we are talked about in the same way we talk about a class, as if everyone has the same economic wealth" (para. 1). The problem with addressing birth cohorts as a whole, is that in doing so, researchers and popular press writers alike assume all shared experiences are perceived universally across classes. Access to opportunity and social mobility undergird many of the narratives about millennial workers. Unfortunately, while there may be unprecedented opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in the current economy, access to these opportunities are still constrained by social class. Creating an internet start-up or becoming social-media famous requires access to certain technologies, computer literacy, and economic/social/cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) that working class people are not likely to have the same access.

These rags-to-riches discourses reinforce the American Dream ideology as one of the most prevalent in the United States. The American Dream "is grounded in the widely shared belief that American society offers equal and unlimited opportunities for those who embrace a strong work ethic, regardless of class origins" (Perrucci & Wysong, 2008, p. 46). Fisher (1973) argued that the American Dream functions on two components: the materialistic (the accumulation of wealth) and moralistic (brotherhood, equal worth, and opportunity for all)

myths. Over the years, Kamp (2009) has traced the American public's preference for an individualistic and materialistic American Dream. Lucas (2011) confirms this shift arguing that, "because Americans have been betrayed by the moralistic variant and satisfied by the materialistic one, the core of the American Dream has come to rest in contemporary times on meritocracy as measured by individuals' material success" (351). As the American Dream espouses the value of equality in doing so, it also reinforces a stratified classed society in the US (Lucas, 2011). The only way a person can experience a change in socioeconomic status is if there are levels of socioeconomic status in the beginning. Moreover, the American Dream presents a particular hierarchy of social-class with lower class at the bottom, followed by working class, middle class, and upper class at the top (Lucas, 2011). This hierarchy then creates middle and upper class status as aspirational, leaving working class and lower class as only a starting point, not an ending (Lucas, 2011). Thus, as new stories of Millennials achieving the American Dream emerge, it is reinforcing this hegemonic narrative of placing middle and upper class or white collar jobs above those of the working class. As we study and talk about age cohorts, especially Millennials, it is vital to consider the socioeconomic class influences on the employment experiences of the Millennial generation. Thus, this study explores narratives of Millennial workers' lived experiences in hopes to disrupt this hegemonic narrative of the working Millennial to shed light on the stories of those that do not fit into its stereotypical mold.

Not only is it problematic to analytically force Millennials in to a single stereotype, it is unfair to assume all Millennials perceive themselves as middle to upper class. One report found that Millennials describe themselves as working class more than any other cohort (Malik, Barr & Holpuch, 2016). In an analysis of the University of Chicago's 40-year General Social Survey

data, *The Guardian* and Ipsos Mori found that Millennials are more likely than their elders to identify as working class and less likely to identify as middle class (Malik et al., 2016).

Moreover, this study found that in the US, under-30s are now poorer than retired populations, and that across wealthy countries, prosperity for young people has plummeted. According to Barr and Malik (2016), "Millennials have suffered real term losses in wages in the US, Italy, France, Spain, Germany and Canada and in some countries this was underway even before the 2008 financial crisis" (para. 11). Despite the 30-year growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the US, younger workers are much worse off than their parents in real terms – they are not making as much money as their parents were at the same age (Bar & Malik, 2016). Malik et al. continue,

> "By 2013, wages for under-35s had declined in real terms compared with those of people the same age three decades earlier, even when stripping out the effect of long-term unemployment during the worst recession in recent memory. This means millennials are much poorer than their baby-boomer parents were at roughly the same stage of their lives" (np).

While there are huge income gaps between generations, the income gap is not absent amongst Millennials. In a report by the McKinney Global Institute (Dobbs, Manyika, Woetzel, Remes, Perry, Kelly, Pattabiraman, & Sharma, 2016), researchers found that the median income for the top twenty percent of Millennial households earned more than eight percent more than the other eighty percent of the Millennial population. Moreover, this wealth inequality is even more exaggerated for single people. Millennials living alone have higher costs of living than their cohabitating counterparts. Not only do they experience more difficulty paying for living expenses, but they earn less money as well (Malik, Barr, & Oltermann, 2016). These unique and

differing economic challenges for millennials need to be further explored to better understand the employment experiences of Millennials and possible changes in perceptions of work. Further exploration of the lived experiences of Millennials in the workforce can help to increase the awareness of stigma experienced by employees labeled as Millennials with increased understanding and providing challenges to unsubstantiated stereotypes. Moreover, the research proposed in this thesis explores the experiences of both body class and text class (Marvin, 1994) Millennials to highlight the diversity and nuances of this particular age cohort.

**Millennials and Work**

One of the major assumptions about Millennials, that arguably spans social classes, is that they fundamentally view work differently than any other generation. Advances in technology and globalization have altered the ways in which work is accomplished in the 21st century (Tsui & Wu, 2005). Previous social contracts between employers and employees were based on the foundation of a lifelong career within one organization. The employee-employer relationship was characterized by loyalty. "Employees expected loyalty and support from their company, and organizations expected commitment from their employees" (Sias, 2009, p. 195). Moving away from the social contract of old: high wages, reliable benefits, and commitment to the employer, Millennials are entering a system "where low wages are supposed to be made bearable by low consumer prices and a hodgepodge of government assistance programs" (Freedman & Lind, 2013). The "New Social Contract" is characterized by contractual economic exchange (Sias, 2009). Because this social contract no longer relies on the relational loyalty, the emphasis on economics has fundamentally changed the nature of the workforce. Sias (2009) found that employers are engaging in cost-saving behaviors, which have "led to an increase in

the number of temporary, contract, and free-lance employees for whom the company does not need to pay benefits" (196).

Temporary work like this is not without its problems (Gossett, 2006, 2002). Gossett (2006) found that the multiple points of control for a temporary worker, from their employer (the temp agency) to the client of their employer (organization where the temporary worker is placed) creates a disconnect in the policies and procedures the temporary worker must follow. While both the employer and the client attempt to control communication channels about the work temporary workers do, neither has the combination of proximity and power needed to maintain complete control over the communication with the temporary workers as it pertains to their everyday duties. The two organizational systems ultimately results in a chaotic experience for temp employees, "creating spaces for temps to do whatever they think is correct or in their own best interests" (p. 407). Some argue that the two levels of organizational systems working together creates more control over the employees. However, the findings of Gossett's (2006) challenges this claim by demonstrating that the dual system often results in more chaos than control. Despite these issues with temporary work, there is a trend revealing a sharp increase in a contingent workforce.

Due to this shift in the employer-employee relationship and communication styles, new ways of working are more and more appealing to Millennials entering the workforce. A "contingent workforce" has become an economic power for both individuals and organizations (Conrad & Poole, 1997). Organizations have the ease of using contract workers which do not require the same overhead costs as full-time employees; The workers have potential for more autonomy and mobility. They can work when, where, and however they want. The rise of the Gig Economy is just one example of this shift in contingent workforce. According to the Bureau

of Labor and Statistics, "a gig describes a single project or task for which a worker is hired, often through a digital marketplace, to work on demand" (Torpey & Hogan, 2016).

While contract work is not a new practice, connecting to employment through websites and mobile applications (i.e. apps) is. This digitalization of contract or gig-based work makes it more readily available to Millennials who are more comfortable with technology and finding work via digital platforms. Companies like Uber, Lyft, Fiverr, UpWork, Air BnB, and Care.com among others provide platforms to connect freelance or contingent workers to potential clients. From ride sharing services to freelance marketing work, the platforms provide services for all types of work. Hyperwallet (2017) surveyed over 2,000 women workers to better understand, "behaviors, career aspirations, and challenges as women working in today's gig economy" (p. 4). Of the women surveyed, majority (58%) were between ages 18-35, meaning majority of those participating in this economy are from the Millennial Generation. According to this study, 86% of the women were turning to gig work because they perceived a greater opportunity for equal pay compared to traditional work. Additionally, they reported to desire more flexible hours and work/life balance, which is consistent with the literature on Millennial expectations of work (Rentz, 2015).

De Stefano identified two main types of work within the Gig Economy: crowdsourcing and work-on-demand. Crowdsourcing (CS) is one of the most popular forms of gig-work that both corporate and academic organizations use. CS is the practice of obtaining needed services and content by soliciting voluntary contributions in the form of an open call from a large network of individuals rather than from an organization's employees or suppliers (Howe, 2008). For example, Uber and Lyft are ride sharing services that connect drivers with passengers to provide rides in the driver's personal vehicle. While ride sharing is one of the more common ways we

think of crowd sourcing, websites like Fiverr connect professional freelancers with potential clients to help with business development projects, so all types of work can be accomplished using crowd sourcing.

Deng, Joshi, and Galliers (2016) found that crowd workers' experiences existed in tension between being empowered and marginalized. The crowd workers revealed the work to be empowering across four dimensions: (1) personal meaning, (2) self-determination, (3) impact, and (4) competence. Of the participants surveyed, 96% reported that they found the work personally meaningful. The meaning of the work varied, financial, choice, doing work that was part of something bigger, but regardless of how the participants found meaning in the work, almost all of them found it to have meaning. Self-determination empowered the workers because they had control of the work they chose to do. No one told them how or when to do the work. The impact of the work was somewhat related to finding meaning in the work. Participants liked that through the work they had a significant influence on others. Finally, the workers felt empowered through the work because it made them feel competent in that they had the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to complete the work. The type of work performed by crowd workers gives the workers unique circumstances to feel empowered by the work which is often contributing to something larger (like academic research) and they get to independently choose when and where they will engage in the work.

Alternatively, Deng et al. study also found that this type of work marginalizes the people participating it. CS marginalizes in four ways: (1) economic marginalization, (2) institutional (policy) marginalization, (3) institutional (technical) marginalization, and (4) competence marginalization. The financial compensation for the work these participants completed was fairly limited. Thus, participants felt financially exploited by the work. The structures and

policies of the particular job request platform studied was perceived to favor the job requesters, rather than the workers. The workers were constrained by a lack of ability to communicate with job requesters via the platform. So, in cases where their work is rejected and they are not paid for the work completed, workers have no way to appeal to the rejection. Next, many workers felt constrained by the institutional technological functionalities of the platform. Finally, workers felt competently marginalized by completing the continuous, simple, repetitive tasks. Ultimately, participants in the study reported feeling simultaneously empowered and marginalized. Due to the nature and structure of CS, the workers felt empowered when the structures enabled choice, yet marginalized when the structures restricted action.

Not only do Millennials communicate in different ways, they also have different assumptions about work/life balance. Schultz and colleagues found that young professionals understand work/life balance in terms of "what they believe it should yield for them and how it is accomplished" (Schultz, Hoffman, Fredman, & Bainbridge, 2012, p. 49). This study looked at the ways in which young single childless employees conceptualized work/life balance. The respondents sought more distinction between work and life spheres and felt they had to defend the life domain from "an invasion by the work sphere" (p. 50). Other studies of work/life balance discourse found that the practical meaning of work/life policies emerged from the manager and employee interaction. Hoffman & Cowan (2010) found that the employer typically has the upper hand in negotiating requests for work/life balance. This study found there was a lack of widespread support for "organizational attention to work/life issues" (p. 219). Thus, the authors conclude that young, single, childless employees value and carefully negotiate the need for work/life flexibility and accommodations.

**Millennials & Workplace Communication**

As employer-employee relationships and the process of accessing, completing and getting paid for work changes, communication within the workplace changes as well. Giving attention to how and when communication happens within an organization is important because communication is how employees establish mutual understanding. Mutual understanding is influenced by perceived group membership because, "communicators who perceive that they share a group membership tend to *move towards* each other, and so *hear* each other more clearly than communicators who perceive that they belong to a different group" (Peters, Morton & Haslam, 2010, pp. 221-222). The perspective that group membership influences individuals' social interaction and relationships with others is a central concept in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity theory proposes that in addition to one's personal identity, self-concept also, "includes knowledge both of one's group memberships (social identities) and of the attributes typically associated with those group memberships" (Peters, Morton & Haslam, 2010, p. 222). So, when individuals are placed in an organization not only do departmental group memberships influence communication interactions, but also larger social identities like age and social class will influence the group interactions within organizations.

One way in which Millennials move toward each other in communication style is bullshitting (Martin & Wilson, 2011). As a unique communication strategy, Millennials reported using bullshitting as a way to present and construct themselves in various situations: interpersonal relationships, work, school, and more. Martin and Wilson (2011) note the importance of this type of communicative behavior in the workplace. As workers engage in venting about grievances, policy decisions, managerial strategies, bullshitting then "serves as a form of narrative action that frames experiences as shared grievances." (Martin & Wilson, 2011,

p. 1262). Thus, bullshitting for Millennials is just one example of how they build relationships within the workplace.

Moreover, Millennials are viewed as more communicatively competent by their superiors than previous young hires (Rentz, 2015). The study showed that managers ranked Millennials 0.5 points higher than previous generations in *choosing the best communication method* (Rentz, 2015). However, this result seemed to conflict with the interview data conducted in the same study when managers reported that Millennials overly relied on email and electronic communication. When the study results were broken out by generation for the respondents into Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers, Gen-Xers typically viewed Millennials more favorably in general than did Baby Boomers (Rentz, 2015). This study shows that an organization provides a unique situation for Millennials where they will interact with a variety of ages on a daily basis unprecedented ways. In previous intergenerational experiences, the power of the more senior person – parent, teacher, boss – will be higher. However, as Millennials enter the workforce, they will experience working on teams with members of other generations which will create a lower power distance because the workplace allows individuals to leverage their expertise for team success, regardless of age (Rentz, 2015).

**Organizational Socialization**

The theoretical perspective guiding this study is Organizational Assimilation. Put simply, organizational assimilation proposes a theoretical understanding of the processes a person goes through as they join and exit an organization. However, the processes described by the theory are much more complex. Kramer (2010) describes two major processes that occur in organizational assimilation: organizational socialization and organizational individualization. The organizational socialization is “the process by which an organization attempts to influence

and change individuals to meet its needs" (Kramer, 2010, p. 3). Socialization encompasses all of the formal and informal ways in which an organization influences and modifies an individual's behavior to meet the needs of the organization; This would include everything from recruiting people with specific skills, training and onboarding, to the norms about working late and lunch breaks. The second process of assimilation is individualization which is, "the process by which individuals attempt to change the organizations to meet their needs" (p. 3). In contrast to the organization influencing the individual, the individual also influences the organization to meet their needs – making suggestions for improvement or alternative ways of doing things to meet their personal needs. Both of these processes happen simultaneously as the organization and the individual come together. As proposed by Jablin (1987) there are four phases individuals experience as they join, becomes part of, and leave an organization: Anticipatory Socialization, Encounter, Metamorphosis, and Exit. I will discuss each of these phases in detail in the following section, paying particular attention to the first two phases as they are particularly relevant to my study.

The anticipatory socialization phase happens in two processes. First, people experience the Vocational Anticipatory Socialization process (Jablin, 1987). During this process, as individuals move from childhood to adulthood, they gather occupational information both consciously and unconsciously, and then use that information to determine the direction of their career (Jablin, 1987, p.734). This occupational information is often gathered from a variety of sources: family, education, part-time jobs, peers/friends, and media. Family members' occupational experience is one of the first ways individuals are exposed to work at a young age. Parents and close family and friends demonstrate the type of work a person can do and teach foundational attitudes towards work in general.

Education is the next major source of occupational information. Through school, young people learn about occupational options beyond those of their family members. Additionally, through friends and peers, they are exposed to even more occupational attitudes and information as they talk about family expectations and goals for work. When they reach a legal working age, part-time work gives young people first-hand experience in the working world to teach them how to communicate and move through an organization. Finally, the media consumed by individuals offers a wide variety of occupational information. (Jablin, 1987). Media could be particularly relevant, given Millennials are digital natives.

Kramer (2010) identified key outcomes of this first phase of assimilation. First, occupational values and attitudes develop based on particular occupations. That is, people in particular occupations typically share values and attitudes. For example, a person working in logging industry will likely have very different values and attitudes towards conservation than a National Park Ranger. These attitudes and values lead to occupational stereotypes. Kramer (2010) found, "An unfortunate outcome of role anticipatory socialization is that certain occupational stereotypes may reduce the options individuals consider" (p. 37). Because individuals are socialized to consider certain jobs to be stereotypically held by males or females, the degree to which they accept and acknowledge these stereotypes will limit the perceived occupational options. Occupational and role socialization also influences an individuals' understanding of what work means and what constitutes a "real job" (Kramer, 2010). All of these outcomes have implications for the decision making process an individual goes through as they select an occupation and ultimately what organizations they will join.

As the individual finds a potential organization within their chosen vocation, they enter the second process called Organizational Anticipatory Socialization. Jablin (1987) describes this

as, “the process of seeking jobs, individuals will concomitantly develop expectations about the organizations and respective jobs for which they have applied for employment” (p. 743). In contrast to the previous phase, the process of joining an organization is rather quick, it happens in a matter of days or weeks (Kramer, 2010). Additionally, Kramer highlights that while an occupational choice is individual, joining an organization is a mutual choice. That is, both the individual and the organization must mutually select one another. Kramer divides organizational anticipatory socialization into two parts: (1) recruiting and reconnaissance, and (2) selection process.

Recruiting and reconnaissance focuses on the dual nature of the organization creating objectives and identifying their organizational needs while individuals are simultaneously seeking out organizations in which they can fulfill a need. This process is primarily focused on the decision about whether or not an individual should apply for employment with the organization. Kramer points us to various recruitment sources where the organization and individuals find one another: public information, campus placement centers, job fairs, employment agencies, temporary agencies, publications, and networking. While there are other areas where the recruitment and reconnaissance intersect, these are the most common. This process provides, “little opportunity for personalization as the organization is mostly attempting to socialize the potential newcomer to meet its needs, and the applicant, at least tacitly, accepts or adopts the organizations values and believes by applying” (Kramer, 2010, p. 53).

Part two of organizational anticipatory socialization, the selection process, builds on the recruitment and reconnaissance phase. This step starts with written communication-resumes and cover letters-and then transitions to oral communication in the form of interviews and/or realistic job previews. After reviewing cover letters and resumes, organizations will invite applicants to

participate in screening interviews. Screening interviews are not only useful for organizations, but for applicants as well. For the organization, the screening interview provides a platform for public relations and advertising about their organization, as well as the opportunity to find qualified candidates. On the other hand, the applicant gains "information about organizations as potential employers" (Kramer, 2010, p. 57). Screening interviews typically happen over the phone, on-campus, or at job fairs.

After the initial screening interview, if the applicant and the organization wish to move forward, the applicant will be invited to an on-site interview. This interview can happen in a few different ways: one-on-one, with a panel, and it could be structured or unstructured. According to Macan (2009), Panel interviews "consist of two or more interviewers who together interview one candidate and combine their ratings into an overall score" (p. 206). As opposed to an interview conducted with only one interviewer, panel interviews are favored by both research and practitioners because they present more structure and validity to candidate selection (Macan, 2009). However, not all organizations are able or willing to conduct panel interviews, thus Macan (2009) recommends that organizations use structured or standardized interviews. In her meta-analysis of interview research, Macan (2009) found that structured interviews provide the most valid results and decreased interviewer decision bias more than unstructured interviews. However, despite this evidence, practitioners rarely use structured interviews.

When organizations do not participate in structured or panel interviews, it opens the organization up to racial and ethnic bias for both the interviewer and applicant. Goldberg (2003) found that more than sex or age, the salience of similar racial identities between the interviewer and applicant had a significant impact on the applicant's perception of the recruiter/interviewer. Consistent with social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), Goldberg's (2003) study

found that when the recruiter and applicant shared a racial identity, the applicant viewed the recruiter more positively than when they did not share a racial identity. This would then influence the applicant's decision to join or not join the organization. Alternatively, the interviewer can also demonstrate bias in an interview. Segrest-Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, and Ferris (2006) studied the ethnic bias of interviewers. When an applicant had both an ethnic name and an accent during the interview, they were rated as least favorable by the interviewers. If the applicant had an ethnic name and no accent, they were moderately favorable, and, finally, if the applicant had a non-ethnic name and spoke with or without an accent they were rated as the most favorable. These studies demonstrate some of the limitations of interviews. Interviews present an opportunity for interviewers to be biased towards equally qualified candidates based on the interviewee's communicative abilities, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

If an organization needs additional vetting of job candidates, they will typically conduct a follow-up/on-site interview. These are most successful when a realistic job preview is included. According to Miller and Buzzanell (1996) the second interview differs from the initial interview in four ways: (a) second interviews occur onsite, in multiple locations while the organization is conducting business; (b) on-site interviews involve multiple sessions that last anywhere form a few hours to more than one day; (c) second interviews involve multiple interviewers; (d) second interviews are much more fluid and less structured. Second interviews allow for more open exchange of information and personalization of the organization. This is when employment decisions are made. While the interview process provides opportunity to make a decision about whether the job and the person are a good fit, or the person and the organization are a good fit, it

is limited by the fact that both parties are hyper aware of self-presentation and impression management.

One way organizations and individuals can move beyond the surface levels of the interview process is through a realistic job preview (RJP). Kramer (2010) notes that RJPs are different from the typical recruitment process because "interviews include not just the remarkable and wonderful aspects of a job, but also the negative and boring parts" (62). RJPs are designed to give an applicant a more holistic view of the job. In doing so, it is argued that the new hire will be less likely to be dissatisfied and quit because the job is not what they had expected. Wanous (1973) notes that the RJP is another type of "screening process" to help eliminate certain types of individuals that would have quit due to the job not being the right match. The goal of an RJP is to match the needs and expectations of the individual with the need-fulfillment of the organization (Wanous, 1973). Popovich and Wanous (1982) argue that the RJP is a particular type of persuasion – "one aimed at exchanging realistic for unrealistic attitudes about the job and organization" (pp. 576 – 577). When compared with those that were not offered a realistic preview of the job, applicants were just as likely to accept the job offer. However, when given an RJP, applicants had more realistic expectations of what the job would entail before starting the job (Wanous, 1973). Thus, a RJP benefits both the organization and job candidates by lowering expectations, which in turn lowers applicant attrition and turnover.

Once an individual begins working at the organization, they enter the Encounter phase in which the organization integrates the individual into the organizational culture. This is a dual process as individuals attempt to individualize their new roles to their specific capabilities and needs, and the organization intentionally socializes the individual into the existing organizational role and culture. Kramer (2010) identifies four frames that have been used to study this phase:

socialization strategies, uncertainty management, sense-making process, and role negotiation. While these frames are often studied individually, newcomers will experience them simultaneously during this phase. Socialization strategies provide conceptual definitions of strategies organizations use with newcomers. While the various definitions provide insight into how individuals come to understand their role within the organization, they often fail to recognize the newcomer as an active participant in the process.

Uncertainty management within the encounter phase seeks to highlight the role of the newcomer in the socialization process (Kramer, 2010). Kramer (2010) identifies four main types of uncertainty experienced by newcomers: (a) task-related uncertainty, (b) relational uncertainty, (c) organizational uncertainty, and (d) political or power uncertainty (p. 77). When individuals experience uncertainty they can reduce it through internal or external sources of information. Internal sources of information would come from the individual's past experience and expertise (Kramer, 2004). Education, past work experience, and common knowledge will fill the gaps of information for many of the questions for the new comer. However, when internal sources fail to provide information, newcomers will need to seek out information from external sources. Peers, co-workers, and supervisors are the most commonly cited sources of external sources of information for new comers (Kramer, 2010). However, external information sources are not limited to these three, many will go beyond to partners, family, friends, written materials, trying, or even watching others perform the task.

Similar to uncertainty management, is the sensemaking perspective. Both perspectives place the newcomer in an active role in the socialization process and focus on the newcomer understanding the environment by assigning meaning. However, while uncertainty management and sensemaking are similar processes, the main difference is that sensemaking involves

experiencing and retrospectively assigning meaning to it (Weick, 2001). Kramer (2010) summarizes sensemaking:

> "As individuals experience their new environment, and particularly as they experience differences compared to their previous environment, they assign meaning to the new events. The development of scripts based on stories and memorable messages indicates that newcomers have an understanding of their new organization" (p. 86).

Uncertainty reduction and sensemaking both frame the encounter phase from the perspective of the newcomer placing them in an active role during socialization rather passively experiencing socialization as a newcomer. These frames demonstrate the processes newcomers experience as they encounter new and uncertain situations and make sense of them.

The final frame to understanding the encounter phase is role negotiation. Unlike the previous perspectives, role negotiation views the socialization of newcomers as an interactive process with existing organizational members and structures. This perspective focuses on how the newcomer and the existing members interact to understand newcomers' roles in the organization. During negotiation, existing members are most likely trying to change the newcomers to meet their wants and needs, while the newcomer is actively trying to change the organization to meet their needs (Kramer, 2010).

Once the individual feels as though they are competent and confident in their organizational role, they enter the Metamorphosis phase. While there is not an exact timeframe for encounter phase to end and metamorphosis to begin, there are qualitative indications of this transition occurring. Metamorphosis typically happens when the newcomer becomes an insider when they are "given more responsibility, have access to privileged or inside information, are included in informal networks, are encouraged to represent the organization, and become sources

of information for others" (Kramer, 2010, p. 96). For Kramer (2010) the most important indication that the individual is no longer a "newcomer" occurs when the individual makes a psychological adjustment from transitioning to managing their situation. This phase will continue until the individual either changes roles within the organization at which point they would experience some of the encounter phase once more, or leaves the organization.

On the surface, the metamorphosis phase seems fairly sensible, straight forward, and even desirable (Gist, 2016a). However, as scholars have analyzed it further, many offer critiques of this phase and whether or not it actually exists or is always desirable. Scholars have challenged the idea of metamorphosis through studying transfer employees (Jablin & Kramer, 1998; Kramer, 1993a, 1993b). The transfer employee is not new to the organization, so they are not in the same position as an organizational newcomer, however due to the change in position, team membership, or organizational position, transfer employees must once again engage in communicative uncertainty management and sensemaking. Thus, they are no longer in the metamorphosis phase, but back in encounter. Thus, this study calls into question whether full metamorphosis can be achieved. Moreover, Gist (2016a) argues for many organizations it is undesirable for organizational members to achieve this level of assimilation into an organization. In studying unemployment support organizations, Gist (2016a) found that the goal of these organizations is not to have their members achieve metamorphosis. Moreover, for the unemployed individuals, it was economically and relationally harmful to become assimilated into the organization enough to reach metamorphosis.

Should the individual either voluntarily leave the organization or be asked to leave, they then enter the final phase: exit. Research suggests there are two major forms of exit: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary exit places the decision to leave the organization upon the

individual. Kramer (2010) identifies a few different motivations for voluntary exit. First, a *planned exit* is one that is planned ahead of time – like graduation, retirement, maternity leave, etc. Next, a person may exit the organization due to a sudden change or shock in the workplace. The shock here could be discovering something unethical within the organization, not being promoted, or announcement of a merger. The shock would have to be so great that it would result in the individual immediately quitting. A similar voluntary exit would be the result of a shock but instead of immediately quitting, the individual would then search for a new job. Gradual disenchantment is a slow process of the employee's dissatisfaction over time resulting in the employee searching for other employment opportunities. On the other hand, involuntary exit occurs when the organization decides to end the relationship with the employee. This could be a result of poor performance of the individual or organizational change (downsizing or merger/acquisitions). Whether voluntary or involuntary, the exit of an individual from an organization impacts both the person leaving, as well as those remaining behind in the organization. The exit, just like the other phases, is an interactive negotiation process as the organization and the remaining employees figure out what to do with the vacancy and how to negotiates relationships moving forward.

While all phases of organizational assimilation offer particular insight into the interaction between an individual and an organization, this paper is primarily focused on the bridge between anticipatory socialization and the encounter phase.

**Research Questions**

Millennials are facing unique and unprecedented circumstances as they enter the workforce. Not only are more of this generation considered to be working class, but this portion of the cohort is often ignored. Across classes, the very nature of work fundamentally changes.

Employers no longer expect employees to work their entire life at one organization. Contingent and contract based work is more common and popular for workers to pursue. Thus, to better understand how these forces are influencing the lived experiences of new Millennial employees in both the body and text classes (Marvin, 1994), I offer the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do Millennial workers' socialization narratives reinforce, challenge and/or transform the dominant narrative about millennial workers?

RQ2: How does social class influence workplace narratives of Millennials?

This study will use an organizational socialization perspective to understand the narrative process Millennials experienced as they gained their first full-time employment.

## Chapter Three: Methods

To answer my research questions, I took a qualitative research approach using narrative methodology. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as a "process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Specifically, the qualitative methodological approach I employed in this project was narrative methodology. Using narrative methodology allowed the participants and me to engage in the co-construction of workforce entry stories through semi-structured interviews.

To better understand why this particular methodology is appropriate, I will first discuss my ontological and epistemological orientations. My ontological, or understanding of the nature of being, focus stems from both a social constructionist and realist position. Thus, I believe that social reality is neither totally objective nor is it totally subjective. Reality is both subjective and objective. Communication is the key to understanding the idea that reality can be both subjective

and objective. Through the use of words, symbols and actions (all of which constitute communication) that reality is formed, reified, or challenged. While there are some aspects of communication that may be objective, the way it is interpreted and understood is subjective to the individual. In sum, I view communication as constitutive because communication brings agency, meaning "the power and freedom to use communication to create the social worlds we desire…Our constructed communicative world leads us to perceive others in particular ways and to frame events with a specific spin" (p. 36).

Building on this explanation, a dual social constructionist and realist positions inform my epistemological orientation. I consider myself to be a critical-interpretive scholar. This research relies on language, and the subjective meanings inherent in the stories the language helps to construct. Language is one of the ways in which humans make sense of the world and convey that meaning to others. In essence, my analysis will interpret the language my participants use to tell stories about their experiences. While experiences and stories may be subjective, "language is a system we use to objectify subjective meanings and to internalize socially constructed meanings" (Allen, 2005, p.38) Taking a subjective social constructionist stance as a scholar opens the possibilities to see what is taken as an objective reality and to reveal the power structures imbedded in that reality. Understanding that reality is both simultaneously subjectively and objectively constructed is vital to social class research because social class is both subjective and objective. For example, social class is objective by government definitional standards, but subjective when it comes to personal identifications and feelings of in-group belonging with particular social classes. Furthermore, age is also objective and subjective. While age is an objective measurement of lifespan, it is also subjective in relation to one's perceptions of age cohorts and intergenerational relations.

In addition to interpretive analysis, I offer a critical critique in my approach to research. Critical theory as a "school of thought" is often associated with the scholarship of the 1920s at the Frankfurt School (Carr, 2000). However, critical theory is much more than merely a school of thought. Critical theory is a process of critique, "which seeks to produce a particular form of knowledge that seeks to realize an emancipatory interest, specifically through a critique of consciousness and ideology" (Carr, 2000, p. 209). Critical theory moves beyond the interpretive perspective by rejecting, "the self-evident nature of reality and acknowledges the various ways in which reality is distorted" (p. 209). The distortion in reality is most often in the forms of how power and authority relations are manifested in everyday life. Moreover, these power and authority relations and their impact on decision making are "real, gendered, classed, institutionalized, and evoked/enforced by specific others in specific ways" (Deetz, 2005, p. 91).

As critical work reveals power structures, the scholars engaged in this work hold out hope that "power/authority relations can be at least momentarily transcended or partly set aside for a more productive interaction, all the while not forgetting about power differences and how sneaky and intrusive they are" (p. 91). Thus, through my work I am interested in revealing how power structures influence the experiences of both white and blue collar entry level employees. In doing this work, my hope is to reveal the ways in which these employees work to overcome or subvert these power/authority structures.

The types of questions asked were best answered qualitatively, and thus require critical interpretation of subjective narrative accounts. The goal for my research is not to gain an explanation of social relationships which can be generalized, rather I seek *understanding* of social phenomena based on situated knowledge (Miller, 2006) and then I will critique any power imbalances manifest in that understanding. I work under the assumption that my interaction with

my informants, our respective backgrounds and life experiences, and socioeconomic status will all come together to influence the results of our co-constructed conversations. Should another person ask the same questions of these same informants, the results would be entirely different, for "Regardless of how many times individuals have told their story or how experienced a researcher might be, each time an interviewer and an interviewee come together for the first time, it marks the beginning of a new relationship" (Corbin & Morse, 2003, p. 341).

**Narrative Methodology**

The research questions posed for this particular study are focused on the stories of participants' lived experiences. Thus, I propose the best way to understand and begin to answer these questions would be through a narrative methodological approach. Fisher (1987) defines a narrative as "symbolic actions- words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p.58). Thus, the experiences which were co-constructed during the interviews would constitute narratives as they describe symbolic actions and construct meaning about the Millennial worker's experiences as they enter the workforce.

Moreover, I agree with Frank's (2010) argument that, "Stories *enact* realities: they bring *into being* what was not there before" (emphasis in original, p. 75). Stories create conditions for experiences to be enhanced or diminished. Those experiences, which we retell over and over, are the stories that guide how individuals understand their own lived experiences. Moreover, those stories, which get told to others, help to construct the perceived reality of their own lives.

Additionally, using Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm, when analyzing the narratives of Millennials, I looked for both probability and fidelity within the stories told. Narrative probability refers to "what constitutes a coherent story" (Fisher, 1987, p. 64) and is used in conjunction with fidelity, meaning evaluating whether or not the stories told by others ring true

with the stories one knows to be true in their lives. Evaluation of fidelity and probability allowed me to "determine the truthfulness of the characterization and decide to believe or not believe in it" (Fisher, 1987, p. 58). It was ultimately evaluation of the truthfulness of the characterization of Millennials from their own experiences that gave insight into both the dominant narrative about Millennials as well as constructed a counter narrative from their own lived experiences.

Stories are powerful. In her talk, *The Danger of a Single Story,* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) explains what happens when a single perspective of a people and their culture is the only one told. Adichie moved to the United States to attend university when she was 19. When she met her roommate, she was confronted by the single story that was told by all those who live in Africa. Adichie concedes,

> "If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner" (5:55).

She then goes on to explain that when a single story is promoted unquestioningly, it gives power to those that benefit from the story, "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie, 2009, 10:11). As a researcher, I am very concerned with the power dynamics and ethics involved in the co-construction of my participant's stories. Not only with the stories that I choose to co-construct, but also my personal power within the interview as the researcher. This is the primary reason why I selected semi-structured interviews for data collection. It gives the researcher the power needed to guide the

interview process and probe areas of interest, but still leaves the interview open enough for the participant to guide and choose what to disclose (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Moreover, in consideration of the power stories have, I seek to find those stories which provide a more authentic and nuanced depiction of the lived experiences of Millennials. Based on the literature previously cited (Malik, Barr & Holpuch, 2016; Ewens, 2016), despite the reality of the majority of Millennials being working class, the stories being told about Millennials depicts them as middle-upper class in white collar jobs. In addition, the dominant narrative about Millennials perpetuates many stereotypes. Thus, I argue that it is vitally important for this generation's stories to be told by their own voices. As Adichie (2009) explains, "Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity" (17:35). All people deserve to feel dignified, through the co-construction of my participant's lived experiences, a more dignified perspective of the working Millennial is presented.

**Data Collection**

Participants were recruited using personal contacts, social media (Facebook and LinkedIn), and university alumni networks. From those initial contacts, purposive-snowball sampling helped to reach saturation. All participants were currently employed, had been working for at least 6 months for their current employer, and worked at least 30 hours per week. The maximum amount of time a participant had been working was 5 years. There were no restrictions regarding race, religion, ability or gender. As this study is interested in workplace entry and the Millennial experience, age and social class were considered as a qualifying factors in recruitment efforts. See Appendix A for recruitment solicitation materials, which include flyers, social

media posts, and e-mails. These materials were distributed via community boards, social media, employers, and email. I recruited 20 participants to interview for this study, evenly split between blue- and white collar workers. Within the white and blue collar interview groups, participants were also evenly split based on gender – 5 male and 5 female blue collar, 5 male and 5 female white collar participants. All participants identified as cis-gender. Data collecting stopped once I reached saturation, meaning that "fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties" (Creswell, 2014, p. 248).

Once volunteers agreed to participate in the study, interviews were conducted face-to-face when possible, however when time and or geography constrained the ability to conduct the interview in person, Skype and phone calls were used to conduct the interviews. Interview length ranged between 30 to 90 minutes, based on the amount of information shared by the interviewee. With the permission of the participant, all interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B), acknowledging their voluntary participation in the study and approval of audio recording for the interview. The identity of the participants was protected by using self-selected pseudonyms. All data – transcriptions, interview notes, audio recordings – were saved using pseudonyms and on stored a password protected computer. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a demographic survey (Appendix C). Third party professional transcriptionists were used to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptionists signed a confidentiality agreement form (Appendix D).

During the interview, the questions focused on asking the participant about the process through which they became employed, and their experience since becoming a member of their employing organization (Appendix E). Specifically, I asked the participants about how they

found and decided to accept their current job. Additionally, the interview explored the ways the participant interacted with the organization before becoming a member of the organization, which allowed the analysis to account for anticipatory socialization processes. I asked questions like, "How did you find your first full-time job? Tell me about the process you went through to get hired." And "What was going on in your life when you were interviewing for this position?" These open-ended questions allowed me to probe interesting accounts, compelling ideas, and incomplete responses. As I guided the interview conversation with these questions, I my aim was to gain a better understanding of the workforce entry narrative and socialization processes of becoming employed full-time as a millennial, and their unique experiences that are related to social class.

**Data Analysis**

As interviews were completed and transcribed, I began analyzing the data using initial coding. "Initial codes are provisional, comparative and grounded in the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117). Because my codes are grounded in the data, this process was inductive rather than deductive, and guided by my data. Initial codes were the first step in the process of understanding the data and finding connections in the experiences of the informants. There are typically two main ways to code qualitative data. Researchers either "develop codes *only* on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants" or "use predetermined codes and then fit the data to them" (Creswell, 2014, p. 199). The codes I used emerged from the information collected from the participants and gave a robust and thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the data. As codes emerged in this process, I kept track of them in a qualitative codebook which was a table of codes with their definitions and meanings. Defining the codes helped to guide the coding process as each code was applied to compelling quotations in the data

(Creswell, 2014). This process was all completed electronically through the use of NVivo qualitative analysis software. While the software is capable of doing automated initial coding, I completed all open coding using a codebook that reflected the emergent design of the study. NVivo offered a secure way to store the data and made the coding process more organized and simplistic enhancing data management.

Moreover, during the open coding process, I used *in vivo* codes which "serve as symbolic markers of participants' speech and meanings" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). Using codes that emerge from the data and using the participants own words gave the analysis depth which could not be achieved by using prescribed codes. Furthermore, Charmaz (2014) argues *in vivo* codes are analytically useful because they help the researcher to "preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (p. 134). *In vivo* codes anchored the analysis of data in the participant's world, which helped to prevent a researcher's preconceived notions or assumptions from overshadowing the analysis. Additionally, using *in vivo* codes served as a check to make sure the researcher has identified and explored what was significant.

Once initial open coding was completed, I moved on to axial coding. Axial coding is the process of finding relationships between and amongst the initial set of codes. Strauss (1987, p. 67) argues axial coding involves creating, "a dense texture of relationships around the 'axis' of a category." Axial coding takes the previous codes created in the open coding process and analyzes the ways in which they relate to create a major category. Categorizing is the process of selecting codes that have "overriding significance or abstracting common themes and patterns in several codes into an analytic concept" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 341). As done in the open coding phase, I defined the properties of each category, "the conditions under which it is operative, the conditions under which it changes, and its relation to other categories" (p. 341) The purpose here

was to synthesize, sort and organize the data and reassemble the codes and data in new ways after open coding (Creswell, 1998). From these major categories I was able to take the most significant categories as the major sections of my analysis.

From the major categories created through axial coding, I then moved onto theoretical coding. Building on the categories and analysis completed during axial coding, theoretical coding moved the analysis to the next analytic level. This was the moment in my analysis process where I moved from description of the data to interpretation of the data. According to Creswell (2014) description "involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting" (p. 199). The codes in the initial and axial coding process will be primarily descriptive. Once I moved to theoretical coding, the codes became interpretive – finding the ways in which the data converged or diverged from one another, and guiding theoretical assumptions and meaning. Theoretical codes aid in making the analysis "coherent and comprehensible" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 151). Charmaz (2014) states that theoretical codes, "are meant to be integrative; they lend form to the focused codes you have collected" (p. 150). The most important aspect of theoretical coding was similar to that of open coding – do not force the axial codes into prescribed theoretical codes. Rather, it was necessary to look at the major categories to guide the theoretical analysis.

**Verification of Findings**

To ensure the trustworthiness of my analysis and interpretation, I used different verification strategies. To start, I used member checking which involved, "taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel they are accurate" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). This did not mean that I give the raw data back to the participants to verify accuracy. Rather, it involved taking the analysis back to participants

to see if it makes sense and rings true with their perceptions of their experiences. Next, I used peer debriefing to verify my findings. This process involved having other communication scholars read and question my findings to see if the findings resonate with others. Finally, an external auditor was used to review the entire project. This person provided an "objective assessment of the project throughout the process of research or at the conclusion of the study" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Using these three major verification strategies in combination with the thick description of my findings will ensure that my research analysis and findings are trustworthy and transferrable.

As data was collected, I organized it into three major themes which helped to create an overarching narrative that was illustrative of the experiences of the participants as a whole. The next section will explore the narrative as it explores the ways in which the data reinforced, challenged, and/or transformed the dominant narrative of Millennial workers.

## Chapter Four: Findings

As I analyzed the data, three major themes emerged that both reified and challenged the dominant narrative of who Millennial workers are. Through the analysis, I did not find large differences across types of work (i.e. social class). The emergent themes were present in both blue and white collar workers as well as for both male and female workers. Using the examples of their lived experiences, this section will explore the major themes from the interview data and how it challenged and/or reinforced the dominant narrative of Millennial workers. The first section explores the tensions in the anticipatory socialization phase of being criticized for being lazy and feeling unqualified for work as Millennials start their job search process. Second, during the encounter phase interviews revealed that Millennials value hard work and are hardworking employees who take initiative and make innovations, which stood in stark contrast

to the stereotypical assumption that they are entitled. Finally, the third section demonstrates that as Millennials enter into the metamorphosis phase, they desire work/life balance, which is consistent with the dominant narrative; however, participants desired work/life balance in conjunction with fulfillment of their strong work ethic.

**Anticipatory Socialization: Lazy & Unqualified**

*Millennials are lazy* is one of the most often ascribed stereotypes for Millennials (Gani, 2016; Graham, 2013). Based on extant research, much of the literature describes Millennials as lazy – meaning once they get a job handed to them, Millennials do not want to work and they expect to be promoted quickly. The Millennials I interviewed expressed frustration with family members criticizing them for not putting enough effort into the job search process.

William, a Staffing Manager, had recently graduated from a four-year institution and moved back in with his family while he looked for permanent full-time employment. As the time went on, his father grew more critical of his efforts:

> "My dad never went to college. He never had to fill out a resume; he never had to apply for a professional job, so he didn't know how to help me…I could feel tension in my house. I could see my dad, he was like "you have a degree, why don't you have a job now?" Every time there was no response or no callback or anything like that you question what you're doing right. Am I ever going to get a job in what I want?"

William is in the unique position of being a first generation college graduate and experiencing social mobility. While he now has the degree to get a job in a white collar profession, his family members, specifically his father, does not have the social capital (Bordieu, 1987) to fully support him or fully understand his job search process. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) defines social capital as, "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by

virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). Thus, William gained social capital – a university degree and the network of support and social status that comes from attaining said degree – that his father never had. William implicitly references his father's social class when he says his father "never had fill out a resume; he never had to apply for a professional job, so he didn't know how to help..." When William explains his father's criticism of William's lack of employment, it created more uncertainty and self-doubt for William, which he revealed when William asks the question "Am I ever going to get a job in what I want?" For William when he experienced uncertainty during his vocational anticipatory socialization process, because of his father's criticism, it only increased his uncertainty in his job search efforts.

For Amanda, a Community Partnerships Coordinator, her first job offer came just in time to calm the frustration she experienced in a similar situation. She also had recently finished her degree and moved in to her ill grandmother's home to care for her as Amanda searched for a job. Prior to receiving a job offer Amanda said she had recently fought with her dad and grandmother about her job search efforts:

> "They didn't think I was doing all that I could. This job kind of came at the perfect time because I didn't know how to prove to them that I was doing all that I could, that I was working really hard to find a job."

Criticism about lack of effort in the job search process from family members appeared only in conversations with white collar workers. The criticism was coupled with other generations' expectations of the job search process and the value of a college education. For Millennials, the organizational anticipatory socialization process is fundamentally different than previous generations due to the ways in which technology has changed the job search process. None of the

participants talked about using a newspaper, walking into businesses to ask if they had openings, or searching for help wanted signs around their town. If they did not have a referral or personal connection, then Millennial job seekers were looking on various job posting websites. Thus, there are physical differences between current and previous job search processes. For some older generations job seekers were required to physically leave the house to apply for jobs. Millennials, on the other hand, do not even have to put pants on to conduct a job interview via video conferencing, such as Skype. So, when Millennials are criticized by older generations in the job search processes, the criticism is likely from the changes in the actual job search process rather than a lack of effort on the part of the job seeker.

In tension with being criticized for being lazy, many Millennial participants felt deeply unqualified in the job search process. As they looked for entry-level positions, participants still felt like they did not meet the minimum requirements to apply. Alternatively, for those that did have some experience, they did not have the *right* experience. The degree or education was just the benchmark. Reflecting on her job search process, Lucy, a Development Coordinator, explained her struggle:

> "Honestly, I hated looking for different jobs, because it made me feel so ridiculously unqualified. Because every time you look for a job, everything says entry level and along the lines of if you have a major similar to this, this is what we're looking for. I looked through several and I was completely discouraged because I was like, "I can't do any of these things.' I haven't had three to five years of experience in this, so I don't necessarily know."

Lucy had already moved past one barrier to employment – gaining a college education – but she still felt constrained by her limited work experience. She did not think she had what it

would take to apply for many of the jobs she was finding. She had a lot of experience from student groups at her university, but it was not necessarily the three-to-five years experience the potential employers were seeking. When she talks about looking for and finding posts for entry-level positions, she says "I haven't had three to five years of experience," which reveals that there is a disconnection between what employers expect of an entry-level applicants' experience and what experience entry-level applicants actually possess.

Many of the participants interviewed seemed to experience similar struggles. For example, after completing her esthetics degree, Jocelynn knew she wanted to end up working in a metropolitan resort city because there was higher earning potential due to the tourism-driven economy. But rather than looking for jobs in that city during her initial job search process, she applied for front desk or reception positions in spas (which do not require the education she completed) rather than looking for work as an esthetician.

> "I'm always my worst critic and I was always more hard on myself. So whether or not I could have gotten a job at [metropolitan resort city] at first, I wanted to start off at like kind of startup spas that were more new. I actually wanted to start as a front desk position so I could, so I wasn't just jumping right into it."

While most Millennials had college or technical degrees, some participants were not confident in their knowledge, skills or abilities. When Millennials entered the job market, they did not know how to communicate to employers that they did indeed have experience, which made them qualified for various positions.

The lack of confidence in their abilities revealed a desire for a slower socialization process into their chosen occupation. For example, Jocelyn did not want to start providing the services which she had just learned to do in her technical program. Rather, she wanted to "start

as a front desk position" so she could familiarize herself with the industry in general before she was doing her ultimate desired occupation. Lindsey's career path also facilitated a slower socialization process. Lindsey, a self-employed house cleaner, started her business by taking on two clients from her mother's business before she decided to take on her own business full-time.

One way that the informants seemed to mitigate the feeling of inadequacy was through job search support. When Millennials were supported either through referrals or internal sponsors, they disclosed more confidence and positive emotions about the job search process. This particular form of social capital, a personal network, appeared to be more important than other forms – education or training. Having communicative advocates also helped Millennial job seekers feel more confident when they applied for openings. An advocate helped the Millennials overcome feeling unqualified because the insider could help get the applicant past initial qualification barriers by vouching on the applicant's behalf to the organization. For example, sponsors could vouch for them to help them secure an interview, which then would lead to the hiring. Jerry, an electrician, summed up the process this way,

> "I feel like if you don't have that 'in' it's a lot harder. For instance, there's a lot of guys that we actually work with that are friends of people who are employed. They get in the door and see whether they like it or not."

This process happened to the majority of participants. Sending in a blind application and then getting hired was the exception to the rule. Tina, Cosmetologist/Salon Manger, described her job search process similarly,

> "So, the owner of the hair school also owns a salon, which is the salon I work at right now. I would help them occasionally with assisting. And I had a friend who also worked at the salon and referred me. And from there I had the interview."

She described the interview as more of a formality, at that point she felt she already had the job based on the experience she had with the owner and her friend at the salon. Additionally, because she knew these people, she was more intimately familiar with the salon's organizational structure and how to navigate the pay structure as well. Tina was able to make a more strategic employment decision because she knew someone within the organization. Thus, having an internal sponsor eliminates some uncertainty for both the employer and prospective employees during organizational anticipatory socialization because communicative advocates act as mediators between employers and job seekers. This particular form of social capital is arguably the most valuable for a job seeker as they enter the workforce.

As a law student, JoAnn (now a lobbyist) described having more institutional support compared to my other informants. However, even though her school was highly invested in her attaining employment after graduation to maintain the school's reputation, JoAnn still benefited from having an advocate and arguably needed an advocate to secure her position. In the following quote, JoAnn describes the process she went through to find her current employer:

> "One of the people in the public interest career center basically emailed me and said, 'You need to apply for this. They asked if we still have good students who don't have jobs yet because it was a little bit later in the hiring cycle and I think you will be perfect. If you don't apply I'll be upset.' And I was like, 'Okay.' I applied for the job fairly quickly…. My professor actually had been a vice president at [a women's law and policy organization] previously, probably a decade prior, I think. She called the woman who is hiring, whom she knows and told her that she should hire me…. I think the only thing that really surprised me was how much it mattered that my professor had called them and told them I will be a good candidate. Because everywhere else that I'd applied and gotten

> interviews, they really liked me but it was kind of one of those things where they were like, 'Yeah, but we want someone else. You were great.' I think that really put me over the top and I was surprised how much it affected the decision making process."

When a Millennial job seeker has a referral or someone who can advocate on their behalf it makes the search process easier overall. It gives Millennials the social capital they need to spend and the "in" they need to secure an interview and eventual employment. While this is not news, for those that had a connection to their potential employer, no matter how weak it was, they did not talk about feeling unqualified in the same ways that those that were looking for employment without support did. Feeling inadequate or unqualified in the job search process for Millennials is an interesting tension existing with being criticized for laziness. During organizational anticipatory socialization, participants reported feeling unqualified and were critiqued as being lazy.

**Encounter: From Handholding to Working My Ass Off**

As the participants talked about their transitions from job seekers to new full-time employees, their experiences started to both challenge and reify many of the existing assumptions about Millennial workers. Throughout the encounter phase, as Millennials learned to navigate the working world, the participants would disclose feeling entitled themselves as well as finding it in their same age coworkers or friends. Contrary to previous research, entitlement was a stereotype identified by Millennials about Millennials, rather than coming from a different generation. In contrast to disclosing a sense of entitlement, the Millennial workers talked about their strong work ethic and dedication to their jobs. From that dedication, came stories of Millennials who took initiative and innovate to improve the workplace.

**Handholding: Owning the Millennial Sense of Entitlement**

In my interviews with Millennial workers, entitlement was the stereotype they most frequently identified in other Millennial workers and in themselves as well. Across social classes, participants often talked about entitlement being a barrier to work. Millennials were told or felt that they deserved better jobs or higher titles before they were ready to take on those responsibilities.

As Talbot, a Programmatic Ad Operations Manager, reflected on his job search process and work experience, he explained how he perceived entitlement in his own experience:

> "I thought, well I'm a college graduate, I deserve this and this, and it shouldn't be this hard. I think it's been kind of, it's been interesting to see how that perspective has changed over time, like I'm in a salaried position, so I have, like I don't get paid more or less if I work 50 hours a week or 30….New people or people in other companies I talk to, it seems like every new person expects things to just be rosy and laid out for them and they can just have it easy, and I felt this way too. They feel like they need their hands held the whole way, and if somebody isn't walking them through every little step it's unfair in someway."

Talbot's experience is a perfect example of how some Millennials perceive themselves. Not only is entitlement a stereotype seen by other generations, but Millennials see it in new employees (typically Millennials) as well. For example, when Talbot says, "they need their hand held" and "if someone isn't walking them through every little step it's unfair" it reveals that Talbot, a Millennial worker, perceives new employees as people who expect someone to be there to show the way. Millennials assume that if the work is not absolutely transparent, there is an injustice happening. Somehow Millennials have been given an impression that work and arguably life will

be easy once they get a job. After Millennials are hired and walk into their positions, new Millennial employees assume workplace expectations should be clear along with how they are to accomplish the goals. This expectation is both consistent with and contrary to socialization literature.

Millennials expectations are consistent with socialization literature since new employees typically have inflated expectations of what the new employer will be like (Jablin, 2001). Typically, when a new employee joins an organization, they will have an positively inflated expectation about what the work will entail based on the company's overly positive self-presentation during anticipatory socialization recruitment efforts.

However, the expectation for transparency and "handholding" is also contrary to literature about socialization because the encounter phase is full of surprise and uncertainty. According to Jablin's (2001) review of socialization research, "the process of entering into a new organization is usually one of surprise and uncertainty for both new comers and incumbents" (p. 757). Thus, the Millennials' desire for high levels of transparency and guidance during their initial socialization into the organization, is not fully accounted for in existing socialization literature.

Millie, a Master Esthetician and small business owner, also echoed similar issues. She shared the following perspective of Millennials new to the workforce:

> "I hear a lot of people…. like, why didn't anybody tell me that this was going to be so hard? Why didn't anyone tell me that it was going to be so difficult to make money? All these things, and in my opinion ….it was your job to figure out, do your things, all this isn't going to just be handed to you"

Both Millie and Talbot hit on a key perception here: Millennials experience unexpected struggle to figure out the work and the expectations of themselves as employees once they begin full-time

positions. As revealed through interviews, the participants perceived their Millennial peers' expectations of work to be breezy; someone will be there to guide them as a new employee through every step of the way. Both Millie and Talbot reference "hands held" and "handed to you" as metaphors for entitlement. When handholding is used as the metaphor to explain expectations of training and socialization into the workplace, it constructs Millennials in a metaphorically child-like state. As children learn to walk, their parents and caretakers hold their hands and walk along with them until the child can walk independently. If the child falls, the caretaker is there to help the child get back up. If this metaphor is applied to new employees, rather than treating them as peers—knowledgeable and capable adults who are capable of making decisions and experiential learning—Millennials will not have the same level of respect and dignity in the workplace as their older workplace counterparts.

As Millennials talk about entitlement within their cohort in the workplace, especially through metaphorical speech like "handholding," they reify the stereotypical narrative rather than challenge it. By continually pointing out behaviors as attributing to entitlement, regardless of whether they are actually entitlement behaviors rather than information seeking behaviors, it solidifies this stereotype of Millennials. Negotiating role ambiguity by asking questions, seeking guidance through mentors, and finding help when needed are all behaviors that should part of the encounter phase and expected of any employee to perform. However, as Millennials have entered the workforce, suddenly these behaviors are no longer constructed as typical new employee behaviors, but rather problematic symptoms of the sense of entitlement inherent in the Millennial generation.

**Working My Ass Off: The Millennial Work Ethic**

Despite these criticisms expressed by my informants and the Millennial stereotype literature, I never got the impression that participants were lazy or entitled. Across social classes participants consistently talked about the effort and time they gave to job search processes and their jobs once hired. Millennials know and recognize the value of hard work. Across social classes, Millennials regularly disclosed their work ethic. Hard work may not have come easily, but when the job required a struggle to perform well, participants did not shy away or quit. Above all else, hard work seemed to be the most contradictory to the dominant narrative about Millennials.

Once they enter the encounter phase, Millennials put in the work. They want to prove themselves and their worth to the employer. For Bailey, Strategic Partnership Representative, there was not a question in her mind about putting in the work, "I never had it in my head to not be working my ass off…we can do hard things as Millennials. We don't shy away from doing difficult things." Bailey sums up perfectly what emerged throughout the interviews – Millennials unquestioningly "work" their "ass off." "Working" one's "ass off" is more than simply showing up to work on time and doing what is asked of you. For the Millennials I interviewed, the "working my ass off" mentality meant they were passionate about their work and were willing to go beyond what was expected by their employers. Contrary to the handholding metaphor, here emerged an entirely different perspective of Millennials. They are far from children learning to walk. They are long distance runners out to win.

For Dexter, a Meat Department Associate, he was aware that his age would influence the perceptions of his coworkers and superiors on the job. He was hyper-aware of his youth as a new

employee; because he was young, he felt he had more to prove than a more senior worker in the same position:

> "I went higher than everybody else's expectations of me, so I went above and beyond what they expected, what they were expecting. I was working harder than everybody else. That's why they were having me jump to other departments… I showed all the ones that told me I wasn't going to stay that I'm here to stay and I kind of proved myself to everyone else that I'm not just a kid. I'm just a good of worker as someone who's been there for 10 years."

Dexter is the ultimate example of someone who has a strong work ethic. Not only did he work hard at his job but he "went above and beyond what they expected" which allowed him to demonstrate his value as an employee. His work ethic helped his employer see past his youth as a negative attribute, and flipped it to his advantage to show he is "just a good of worker as someone who's been there for 10 years." Dexter did not need his handheld.

Upon reflection, Millie, Master Esthetician and small business owner, realized she was "glad" she took on her own business, even though it was the more difficult career path:

> "It took me a long time to get to the level that I felt like I was really happy with my work. I would look at other people's work and I would be like, why doesn't mine look like theirs? But I think if I would have known how long it would take, and how frustrating ups and downs this whole process would be, I don't know if I would have done it. So I'm glad I did it, because I think it's a good career opportunity for me"

Millie's persistence and resilience when faced with job difficulty is notable. She does not say that the process was easy, rather she says it was "frustrating" with "ups and downs." Millie had highs and lows as she learned her new skill and established her business. She mentions

comparing her work to more established or skilled people in her field when she says, “I would look at other people’s work and I would be like, why doesn’t mine look like theirs?” Interestingly though, she uses them as a comparison (which is a typical information seeking behavior for someone in the encounter phase), not a crutch. She makes it through this process without mentioning the need to have someone constantly showing her the way, but she does have resources to help guide her to know what someone’s work looks like who is highly skilled. As a result of her “working” her “ass off,” she is now at a point where she is “happy with her work” and is “glad” she persevered to make the business work. Much like the two previous exemplars, she did not shy away from the challenges when presented. Millennials persist in the face of challenges through hard work.

Similarly, Tina, Salon Manager, said that being open to taking on whatever she was presented with helped her advance within her career.

> “I feel like I got to where I am because I was willing to wear many different hats. There was no job beneath or above me. So I think I have a good work ethic and a good attitude. And those are the two things I live by, and I think it shows through with the people I work with and my clients too. They love coming to me because I have that good attitude.”

Tina recognized that not only has her work ethic helped her advance her career with taking on more responsibility, but it also has built loyalty from her clientele. Working in a service industry, Tina needs to have a strong client base to keep her business going. So, when Tina’s clients recognize her for her work ethic and positive attitude, it helps to reinforce those positive behaviors for her occupational success. If her clients are her source of income and they reward

her behavior with their continued loyalty and financial compensation, it reinforces those behaviors for Tina to continue to develop and demonstrate as she progresses as a professional.

Talbot echoed others sentiments about hard work when he described his experience. Talbot accepted his position at an ad-technology start up business. Talbot was told in the interview that it was going to be a learning process:

> "They pretty much told me that the whole company was learning together, and that it wouldn't be easy, and they were looking for people who would like actually give a damn about the job they do, and eventually the company…find personal investment in the company and yeah I guess they prepared me by telling me it was going to, for lack of a better word, suck for a little while…. It was crappy, but it was fun, it was challenging, but rewarding."

Talbot had to learn a new skill set along with others at his company as they grew and figured out their market. While he admits the work was "crappy" and "challenging", he also says the work was "fun" and "rewarding." His language use reveals that despite knowing the job would be a learning process, it was not without struggle. Yet, the struggle did not deter him from staying with the company. He was loyal to the company to put in the time and effort to become a valuable employee.

**Initiative & Innovation: Results of the Millennial Work Ethic**

As a result of the "working my ass off" ethic, Millennials not only found ways to succeed within their given organizations and fields, but also found ways to improve the organization itself. Taking initiative, or "the power or opportunity to do something before others do" (Merriam-Webster, 2017), was a behavior described by participants that came as a result of their strong work ethic. The participants found ways to show they were eager to help improve or

prove themselves as a valuable employee whenever they saw an opportunity. Moreover, their initiative taking often resulted in the Millennial participants talking about ways in which they spearheaded innovations – "introduction of a new idea, method or device" (Merriam-Webster, 2017) – for their organizations.

When Millennials are supported by a superior, they have an opportunity to prove that they have a strong work ethic and can take initiative. Sandra, a Package Handler for an international parcel service, talked about how all she needed was her supervisor to give her the opportunity to show she could excel in her position as a package handler:

> "I guess that first time I loaded 300 PPH [packages per hour] I remember this day, actually. I was put in one of the heavier trailers because the person that usually works in that trailer wasn't there, so I told my boss at the time, which was Brandon [pseudonym], I was like Brandon, put me in California, which is the name of the trailer. He was like no, you have to have a three hundred PPH to work in that trailer, and I was like put me in there, I can load that, you guys just never put me in a trailer that gets that much flow, put me in there, so he did. We always get a break between 12:30 and 1:00, it's ten minutes long. If you don't want it you don't have to take it, but everyone gets it, the whole building. He put me on that trailer, and then after like the first hour he checked the computer, and he was like dang. I was sifting at a four hundred PPH, just from that first hour, that's how many packages I had loaded. He's like dang, you're doing really good. He's like let me check this again, so he refreshed it and it still said that. He was like okay, I guess you can be in that trailer, then. I was like I told you!"

Sandra works in a heavily male dominated workplace. Being one of the few women working in a labor intensive position, her supervisor underestimated her ability to do the work expected of

the high-demand situation. Sandra did not let his low expectations limit her desire to prove her worth. Not only does Sandra show her male supervisor that she can do the work required to work the heavier labor, she exceeds the requirement. When she assures her supervisor that she can handle the heavy load by saying, “I can load that, you guys just never put me in a trailer that gets that much flow” it reveals that she has the confidence and desire to do the hard work, but assumptions about her ability has prevented her from demonstrating what she can do. Sandra is expressing a desire to metaphorically walk on her own, she is ready to let go of the guiding “hand” and show she can work independently.

For Trevon, Business Consultant, he felt empowered to take initiative to improve a process within his organization. Working in the oil and gas industry, he saw a lot of processes that were in place and had been in place for a while, but saw opportunities for improvement: “We had a process in place of what we were doing, and for the first month, I just did what I was told. Then, I started asking questions about why XYZ and why ABC. It was taking 30 days for that process, and two months later, we were doing it in 10 days just because I felt like there are things that need to be changed”

Contrary to the stereotypical/stigmatizing narrative about Millennials being lazy and entitled, given the opportunity to prove themselves, the participants took initiative and exceeded expectations of what their perceived capabilities were. For example, when Trevon states, “I started asking questions” it reveals he wanted to understand the process the company had in place, he was seeking more information. After gaining an understanding of the reasons behind the process, he was then able to see opportunities for improvement for his organization. He was able to create improvements to take a process that was “taking 30 days” to “do it in 10 days just

because I felt like there are things that need to be changed." Trevon recognized opportunities for improvement within his organization. He was innovative and excited to help things improve.

Finally, if the participants did not know how to do the work that was asked of them, it did not stop them from finding a way to get the work done. Millennials say yes to work of all types. Sheldon, carpet cleaning and power washing business owner, after starting his carpet cleaning business was looking for ways to grow his business. He happened to have a conversation with a new client and found an opportunity to expand his work by adding a new service—power washing:

> "I had an opportunity to pressure wash a bunch of gas stations. The guy came to me and said his pressure washer was fucking up and the guy just would never show up. I told him I guarantee my work and I told him, 'I guarantee I'll never show up late. I'll never miss a day.' He gave me the opportunity, so I went and opened up a pressure washing business."

At the point that he was given this opportunity, he did not even have the equipment needed to take on this job, but said yes anyway because he saw a good chance to expand his business, demonstrating he knows how to take initiative and innovate. Moreover, he showed the potential customer that he held himself personally accountable because he guarantees "I'll never show up late. I'll never miss a day." This also shows Sheldon has a strong work ethic to be there on time, do good work, and to follow through on his word.

These exemplars demonstrate that while the Millennials may know the work is going to be difficult upfront, it does not make them any less willing to do the work and put in the time to gain the skills needed to be successful. They want to work, take initiative, innovate, and have a

desire to be of value to their workplaces and clients. While they may be perceived as feeling entitled to work, the sense of entitlement does not negate a strong work ethic.

**Metamorphosis: Work Hard, Play Hard**

The final major theme within the data was a desire for work/life balance which is consistent with the dominant Millennial generation narrative. While the participants were at varying phases of socialization within their respective organizations, I argue that they all had reached a level of metamorphosis in being socialized into thinking of themselves as a professional. Millennials reached a point in their stories where they knew who they were as professionals and had a desire for creating more balance in their lives, which commonly emerged in the data. The participants communicated a desire for this in different ways, but overall this was consistent with both blue and white collar workers. In contrast to talking about hard work, participants often talked about having work/life balance and metaphorically playing as hard as they work. The participants recognize the personal and professional benefits of self-care and work/life balance. Moreover, having a balance between the time they spend at work and outside of work did not negate working hard while on the job. They know that enjoying your work makes it fun and exciting to work hard, and maybe even helps employees be hard workers. When employees enjoy their work, they also benefit from not having the emotional labor of dreading going to work every day. They are intrinsically motivated to go to work every day which, in a way, creates a balance between work and life because their work is more in line with the employee's personal values and passions.

Millennials recognize the importance of working for an employer that maintains a satisfying work environment. When asked what she will look for in future employers, Bailey

gave the ultimate stereotypical Millennial answer, "Unlimited Paid Time Off" (PTO). However, she offered the following caveat:

> "I would definitely like a company that has unlimited PTO. Because that is on the rise as far as what companies are happening. I say that because I know myself enough to know that I would never take [unlimited PTO] too far but, it would be nice."

When the desire for work/life balance is presented in conjunction with a hard work ethic, it changes the narrative about Millennials from being lazy employees wanting unlimited vacation time, to hard workers that recognize the need for a balanced life. Hard work cannot be sustained indefinitely. Millennials understand the benefits of taking a break from the day-to-day grind to relax and rejuvenate. A healthy balance between the professional and personal life is what Millennials desire whether they create it for themselves through starting a business, or looking for an employer that is willing to provide a healthy balance to employees.

The desire for control over one's work/life balance was most important to blue collar entrepreneurs. Of the ten blue collar participants, four owned their own businesses. Autonomy, power and control were the driving factors for these individuals to start a business. They wanted more autonomy in the workplace and control over when and how they worked. Sheldon took some time to figure out what exactly he wanted to do, but he knew why he wanted to do it:

> "I stopped working and I took a couple months off work and I was trying to figure out who I was and what I needed to do. All I knew that was I wanted to own my own business. I didn't want to work for anybody else ever again. I didn't want to have to answer to anybody. Just my dad died and they told me I couldn't take off work, and that was just crazy to me, so I took the time off."

When a major life event happened for Sheldon, he needed time away from the workplace to deal with the emotional pain and transition of losing his parent. However, when his previous employer did not offer him the time off that he needed to be mentally and emotionally ready to work, he quit. While that may have been a financially risky move, it was what Sheldon needed to do to handle personal aspects of life. Because of that experience, he then decided that he wanted to be his own boss, so that he could control when he worked. Being a business owner gave Sheldon autonomy over this own schedule. He could control his life and dictate his own work/life balance. He was not passionate about the work or the business he wanted to start. His motivation rather, came from a desire to have the power to say yes and no to what will help his mental and emotional health. In summary, Sheldon was denied work/life balance and then decided to create it for himself.

Similarly, for Lindsey, starting her own business was driven by a desire to have time off more so than a passion for the work. When she described why she decided to start her own business, she said, "Taking as many vacations as I want. Really, that was the biggest thing. The other thing was I knew I could make more money doing this than the other two jobs I had in the same year." So for her, not only did owning her own cleaning business offer her the perceived ability to take as much vacation time as she wanted, or to control her schedule, but also the added benefit of a higher earning potential and financial stability. Higher earning potential and financial stability would give her more economic power to live life the way she desired.

Next, flexibility of owning your own business was appealing to both Millie and Jocelyn. Both of these participants work in the beauty industry and have gone through similar schooling and own similar service-based businesses. Millie wanted to be her own boss, she realized early on in esthetics school that she would commit to owning her own business:

"As far as doing my own business, that was a decision I made as far as what would be most profitable and enjoyable for me, because I also don't necessarily like working for other people and I like to be my own boss…. Being my own boss was really appealing to me. And the opportunity for growth, to be honest with you, the thought of working a nine to five job I would rather, oh my gosh, that sound horrible to me. I hate that. So the fact that my schedule could be more flexible, and there is so much opportunity for growth, financially but also as a business. In my personal life I'm all about personal growth and development, so that was super important to me too in a business"

Again, similar to Lindsey, Millie decided to go into owning her own business not only because she saw a higher earning potential, but she also wanted to harness the opportunity for "personal growth." It offered flexibility that a typical nine-to-five cannot. Jocelyn was also attracted to the flexibility of owning her own business:

> "I've always wanted a job that I love, that I would love… the other thing that drew me in was the flexibility of being able, um, work my own, like set my own hours and potentially make what I want to make… also the fact that I could work from home, and I could be a stay at home mom and make what I want, whenever I want. I can go on vacation whenever I want. Um, really have control of everything I guess. It is nice because, like recently I have been getting a lot busier. I have been turning away clients and I can give myself raises if I want… just the flexibility and control. I really like that."

These entrepreneurs are driven by desires for flexibility and control over their work days. They want to have the power to determine what days and for how long they will work. They know that their pay check is dependent on the work that they put in, but at the same time, they are also in control of how much work they do. Unlike their peers who work on salary, the entrepreneurs

will not make the same amount of money if they work "50 hours a week or 30." Because their time is much more closely monetized from owning their own business, they valued the flexibility and control it offered more than the other participants.

Note, a desire for work/life balance was not absent from the non-entrepreneur participants. The other participants still had a desire for it, and mentioned that it influenced the industry they chose for employment. William chose to work in hospitality because the benefits of working at a hotel supported his desire to travel:

> "I've always had this wanderlust, and because I've had that wanderlust, it was to me, the obvious option as to go into airlines so I could travel. Then I learned about this other side of the hospitality industry, which is really truly more hospitality than airlines are."

While William did not go on to say whether working in hospitality gave him the ability to satisfy his desire to travel, it was an influence on him to choose that industry in the first place.

Finally, when given the opportunity to see how others balance life and work, it can change previous notions of what work/life balance means. For Aubrey, an Account Manager, she realized that it is possible to keep working after starting a family:

> "I think it's definitely changed kind of what I was thinking was my game plan. Mostly because initially I wanted to work and then go to get a teaching license and teach and then I would get married, have a family, not do really… I have never had wanted to work after I had a family. But now, there's only six of us girls in our company of 36 and all of them have families and all work and they have definitely changed my perspective of what I could do in the future."

For the women who desired to become mothers, work/life balance and motherhood were important to their understanding of becoming part of the workforce and maintaining

employment. The two examples here, Jocelyn and Aubrey, have found different ways to manage what the working mom looks like, how to create that identity within themselves, and how that relates to work/life balance. Participants realized that working moms can find work/life balance in both white and blue collar occupations as long as they have the examples to show that it is a possibility.

While a desire for work/life balance is not a new characteristic of Millennials, the perspectives given in this section offer a more nuanced understanding of what work/life balance means to them. It is not an absence of hard work, rather finding the balance between working hard and then taking the time to give oneself a reprieve from the day-to-day stresses of full-time work. This theme confirms the dominant narrative of Millennial desire for work/life balance, however, it adds to the understanding of what work/life balance means to them, how it influences their occupational choices, and how work also influences their perspectives of work/life balance.

**Summary**

Throughout this section I have addressed three dominant themes that emerged from my analysis of the interviews I co-constructed with my participants. These themes come together to create a narrative that affirms and challenges the dominant narrative about Millennials, which ultimately results in a more nuanced perspective of Millennials in the workforce. First, during anticipatory socialization, Millennials struggled to overcome the perception of their family members that they were lazy in their job search process. Moreover, Millennials felt overwhelmingly unqualified as they participated in the job search process even when they searched for entry-level positions. Fortunately, Millennials could overcome feelings of inadequacy by utilizing their social capital. When they had a communicative advocate to help

them in the job search process they felt more confident and were more successful in their job search process.

Second, as they enter the encounter phase, Millennials are faced with a tension between needing their "hand held" and "working" their "asses off." Millennials not only described a sense of entitlement in other Millennials, but also found it in themselves as they entered the workforce. Thus, by perpetuating this stereotype, this particular part of the Millennial narrative becomes more solidified as they reify it through metaphors like "handholding." Conversely, this strong sense of entitlement is challenged by the strong work ethic of the new Millennial worker. Millennials were eager to prove themselves as valuable employees as they persevered through challenges as they progressed in their careers. As a result of this persevering work ethic, many of the participants found opportunities to take initiative and to innovate to the benefit of their organizations.

Finally, the last theme explored the ways in which Millennials conceptualize work/life balance as they enter the metamorphosis phase of organizational socialization. Not only do Millennials know how to work hard, but they also desire to play hard – or at least have the option to do so. Millennials desire to have a healthy balance in their lives between work and non-work time. While many talked about finding this with current or prospective employers, others took it upon themselves to take control of their work/life balance. Blue collar entrepreneurs were motivated by a desire for control of their time and money to be self-employed. While this theme did not challenge the dominant narrative about Millennials, it did offer a more nuanced perspective of what work/life balance means to Millennials and how they go about creating that balance.

The narrative findings of this study offer a more authentic understanding of the Millennial organizational socialization processes. In the next chapter, I discuss the study's contributions as well as the larger theoretical and practical implications of this study.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

To conclude this manuscript, I will discuss the ways in which the findings of the previous chapter contribute to our understanding of the Millennial worker. To begin, I will bring the themes from my findings together to create a more authentic narrative that nuances the dominant Millennial narrative. Then, I will revisit my research questions and explain ways in which my analysis has answered these questions. Next, I will move on to the contributions of this research by articulating both theoretical and practical implications of the work. Following the contributions of the research, I will discuss the limitations of this particular study. Finally, I will close by proposing future directions for research regarding Millennial workers.

### An Authentic Millennial Narrative

The following narrative integrates the workplace socialization and entry experiences of Millennials interviewed for this project. The themes represented in this new, authentic narrative directly challenge the negative stereotypes about Millennials and workforce entry, allowing Millennials to speak for themselves rather than to be spoken for or about.

Imagine you are a 20-something Millennial searching for your first full-time job. You have completed either a technical or four-year degree and have some part-time work experience. During school, you took classes and participated in student groups that would help prepare you for your chosen field. As you begin your job search process, you realize that many of the entry-level positions you are finding are asking for experience and skills that you may not have now, but could easily learn on the job. As you struggle to find a job you feel meets your wants and

qualifications, you are also aware that many people view your generation as lazy and entitled. Recently, your parents have been increasingly criticizing you for not putting enough effort into your job search process. You try to not let these negative perceptions influence you as you search for jobs, but the job search process is taking longer than you thought it would. Some of your friends tell you that you should give up looking for a job in your industry and just take whatever comes your way that offers a pay check. Nevertheless, you persist in your job search and find a friend that is willing to make a recommendation for you at her job. Her recommendation helps you get an interview, and after you are able to communicate your skills and your fit with the company you get a job offer.

Because you are tired of your job search, you decide to take the job because you want to end the search. You know if you can get your foot in the door here and build your skillset, you will be in a better position to find your dream job down the line. When you get the official offer, the salary is a little less than you would like to make given the degree and experience you have, but since you are new to the workforce, you do not ask for more money. You do have a family vacation coming up in three months, so you negotiate to have that time off. The company does not give paid time off until you have been employed for a year, so any time you take off you will not receive pay for the time you are not working.

As you start your job, you know you need to put in extra effort to overcome some of the negative perceptions about your generation. Sometimes when you have questions, you get push back from your coworkers. It seems like they expect you to figure it out on your own. You go above and beyond the expectations of your position. You work late when you need to make sure your project is done by the deadline. You go out of your way to build relationships with your clients and to find new ones for your company. You put forth the effort that some of your young

coworkers are not willing to do. They seem to need more help to figure out their jobs than you do. It's almost like they need their hands held. When you see an opportunity for improvement within your organization, you approach your boss with your suggestion and your boss tells you to implement it right away. You are not afraid of working your ass off. You believe in your work ethic. You feel like you are making the company better and enjoy most parts of your job. While it may not be where you expected to be after you finished school, you are grateful for the job. You feel like it has given you a better sense of who you are as a professional in your industry, even if you do not see yourself staying with the organization in the long term. One day when you check your LinkedIn account, you see an opening for a position that aligns more with your new skillset and has good opportunities to develop more as a professional. Even though you have not been with your current employer for very long, you decide to apply for the new job in the chance you get it. You realize that you are happy you did not give up on your first job search and were able to prove yourself to be a valuable employee.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to answer two research questions: (1*) In what ways do Millennial workers reinforce, challenge, and/or transform a dominant socialization narrative about Millennial workers?* And (2) *How does social class influence workplace narratives of Millennials?* The results of this critical interpretive analysis pose interesting and compelling answers to both questions which ultimately create a more nuanced understanding of the Millennial workers' narratives regarding workplace entry.

I will begin by answering the first research question about ways in which Millennial workers reinforce, challenge and/or transform a dominant socialization narrative about Millennial workers. The Millennials I interviewed reinforced the narrative by perpetuating the

entitled stereotype because they perceive their peers and themselves as entitled. While the entitlement behaviors may or may not be actually occurring within the socialization process, because the Millennials describe it about themselves and other Millennials, they reify the stereotype and perpetuate the dominant narrative. Reifying this stereotype is problematic as Millennials enter the workforce and exhibit behaviors that could be used to reinforce a negative perspective of themselves as new employees. Moreover, the lazy and entitled stereotypes often perpetuate one another. When Millennials are perceived as lazy it casts a negative perspective of what they can do in the workplace. For example, when they ask for help or need assistance learning the new job or role, they have been criticized for needing to have their "hands held." Thus, this dominant narrative is discursively constructing the reality of the Millennial work entry experience. In some sense the entitlement and lazy stereotypes become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ultimately, these two stereotypes working together creates a hostile situation for Millennials as they enter the workforce because it puts Millennials in a work environment where their work ethic is already in question before they have a chance to show organizational members what they can do. Thus, when the Millennials enter the workplace, based on the dominant narratives, they often are over eager to say yes and to prove themselves. The Millennials are hungry to show what they can do to prove the stereotype wrong. Rather than viewing Millennials as lazy and entitled youngsters, employers ought to view Millennial employees as highly valuable organizational members for their willingness to say yes to any task and their unrelenting work ethic. Unfortunately, until employers engage in a change of perspective, the combination of negative stereotypes and intense work ethic were the perfect recipe for workplace exploitation.

As these Millennials entered the workforce, one of the ways in which they challenged the dominant narrative about themselves was through dedication to the work and a strong work ethic. Millennials showed up ready and eager to take on new challenges. They often talked about making an impact or a difference, often through mentorship they had received. They knew that in order for that to happen, it would take hard work and be a challenge. Millennial workers wanted work that was challenging and would make them better professionals.

In addition, Millennials rarely mentioned compensation or money as a central importance to their work lives. When asked what made the job attractive to them before they accepted the position, monetary compensation was rarely stated as the reason for accepting the position. Additionally, when asked if they negotiated any part of their job offer, most responded that they did not negotiate the salary. When participants did negotiate it was typically in connection with time off. Financial capital does not seem to be a motivator or driver to work for these early career professionals. This could be because Millennials have lived through the recession and know that a paying job is not always easy to come by. They could value the type of work or employer more than the monetary compensation. Perhaps they were not taught to negotiate or ask for more money in the job search process. Millennials should be more cautious when taking on extra work without extra compensation otherwise they may face burnout (which we know they are cautious about based on the findings regarding to work/life balance) or lose out on long term financial stability and possibly opportunities for upward mobility.

Finally, blue collar entrepreneurs' experiences offer a transformative narrative of Millennials. As entrepreneurs, they had slightly different socialization process. While many of them had participated in traditional employment (both full and part time), it was not the end-point of socialization for them. Rather than being socialized into a traditional job, they exited

traditional employment to begin their own businesses. This exit shifted their personal narratives, while also challenging the master narratives about Millennials' values related to paid work.. These Millennials took control of their work and their lives. Their experiences stood in stark contrast to the entitlement dominant narrative, because becoming a successful small business owner was not something that can be handed to these Millennials. Blue collar entrepreneurs offer services that were highly dependent on building a solid client base. Many of them discussed struggling to build this clientele, but that persevering to build it up and make the business successful was worth it. These blue collar entrepreneurs embodied resiliency as they persevered to build successful businesses. Moreover, the blue collar business owners offered a different perspective of Millennial entrepreneurs. Different from the Silicon Valley tech start-up searching for funds from venture capitalists, these blue collar entrepreneurs are not trying to create the next big technology. Rather, they are focused on providing a quality service they knew how to do, which while requiring similar network-building skills as young tech entrepreneurs, did not require a significant amount of start-up funds. In these ways, the blue collar small business owners offered a transformative story of the Millennial work entry experience.

Now turning to the second research question, I will address how social class influenced workplace narratives of Millennials. In short, social class had only a slight influence on the workplace entry experiences of Millennials. Generally speaking, attitudes towards and about work were strikingly similar across social classes. However, there is one compelling finding related to social class.

Blue collar entrepreneurs had more of an awareness and desire for control over their work lives. They wanted to have more autonomy which could not be found from traditional employment. Allen (2011) claims, "Members of the working class tend to have relatively little

control over their jobs" (p. 96), which means the working class employees typically have less power to make decisions regarding time and income. As this was the case for many of the entrepreneurs, they decided to take control over their jobs by starting their own businesses. As a result, not only do these entrepreneurs overcome their working class constraints, but they also challenge the negative stereotypes of their generation (i.e. lazy/entitled) by the nature of their work itself. To be an entrepreneur, one must be the opposite of lazy and entitled; the entrepreneur must be proactive and hardworking to achieve their business goals. Blue collar entrepreneurs have constructed work/life balance through initiative and innovation, which paints a more nuanced narrative of blue collar Millennial workers given the intersection of classed and aged identities of this group. Blue collar entrepreneurs defy many of the constraints of being both Millennial and working class through starting their own businesses.

## Contributions

This research offers many contributions to current research regarding Millennials in the workforce. First, I will discuss the scholarly contributions made by the voices of Millennials; second, this research challenges and nuances the dominant narrative in meaningful ways; finally, theoretical contributions will be discussed.

### Scholarly Contributions

The first contribution of this study comes from the participants themselves as Millennials. Because this study took a qualitative focus, their actual words and experiences were voiced. The participants aided in the co-construction of this research in a way that is unique to qualitative research. They shaped and controlled the data and directed the analysis process. Rather than relying on the perceptions of Millennials by other generations, this research uses the lived experiences of Millennials, standing on their voices to understand their experiences, and

informing the broader understanding of who they are and what they have to contribute to the workplace.

Second, this study demonstrates the problematic nature of the dominant narrative and provides a more nuanced understanding of Millennials in the workplace, providing a useful contribution to the conversation about Millennial workers. It challenges the dominant narrative by addressing the stereotypes of Millennials and how Millennials are working to overcome those stereotypes as they enter the workforce.

Finally, this paper offers a contribution to organizational socialization theory by offering a different perspective of what it means for a person to reach the metamorphosis phase. Building on organizational communication research about the role of professional identification (Lammers & Garcia, 2009) it appeared that these Millennials identified more with their profession than their employer (Russo, 1998). Moving beyond one industry, this research shows that Millennials from various types of work (i.e. social class) and industries were more likely to reach a sense of confidence and identify with their profession rather than the organization. In essence, as early career professionals new to the full-time workplace, Millennials may identify more with their general profession (i.e. content marketing, recruiting) rather than their employing organization.

Additionally, the changing nature of the employer-employee relationship may be another influence on the number of Millennial job changes (Sias, 2009). As discussed earlier, the social contract between employers and employees has largely shifted from the lifetime employment promised to many White working class workers in generations past, to third party contract-based work increasingly prevalent across the Gig economy of today. As a result, people of all generations seeking to craft their own longer-term employment stability are more likely to change jobs, and even careers, more frequently. Given these broader dynamics, Millennials being

considered "job hoppers" may be more due to these broader changes in the employer-employee relationship rather than a generational trait specific to Millennials.

**Theoretical Contributions**

There are also a number of theoretical implications from this study. One of the key findings of this study was that Millennials do reinforce the dominant narrative about Millennial workers being lazy and/or entitled when they enter the workforce. One of the ways in which this dominant narrative is reinforced by Millennials is through internalized oppression. Lipskey (1987) defines internalized oppression as, "turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the . . . oppression of the (dominant) society" (p. 6). The Millennials described a "turning on" themselves by forcing themselves to work above and beyond the expectations of their supervisors and coworkers. They also turn on other Millennials by either not claiming the Millennial identity label, or criticizing Millennials for the same things that other generations do (i.e. laziness, entitlement).

Internalized oppression seemed to be especially present for the women participants. As they talked about a desire for a slower socialization process, it revealed their internalized oppression. Many women spoke about how overwhelming job descriptions and the search process was for them. Some of the women responded to feeling unqualified in the job search process by either removing themselves from the pool of applicants by not applying, or digging in with fortitude to apply for the jobs. Ibarra, Ely and Klob (2013) refer to this as "second-generation gender bias." Second-generation gender bias is a subtle phenomenon occurring for many women in the workplace that limits their progression as professionals. Ibarra, Ely, and Klob (2013) continue, "Second-generation bias does not require an intent to exclude; nor does it necessarily produce direct, immediate harm to any individual. Rather, it creates a context—akin

to ‘something in the water’—in which women fail to thrive or reach their full potential” (n.p.). This bias was especially present in women participants. For example, Sandra’s supervisor was hesitant to put her in a high frequency load truck when she asked for the opportunity. Then when she demonstrated she could keep up with the necessary standards, her boss did not believe the first results and refreshed the system screen to double check her skill was accurate. Also, Aubrey’s change in perspective of working mothers offers an insight into how women and employers can work together to overcome the second-generation gender bias and internalized oppression within women. These were just a couple examples. The stories of Lindsey and Jocelyn revealed a similar internalized oppression related to the second-generation gender bias (Ibarra, Ely, & Klob, 2013).

Internalized oppression is dangerous for Millennials because they overcompensate for the negative stereotype and are also not concerned about being fairly compensated financially (or otherwise) for their extra effort. Moreover, the internalized oppression created by the dominant narrative is potentially more dangerous for working class and low income individuals because if they are not pursuing raises or being fairly compensated for their work, they will not be able to keep up with inflation and/or improve financial stability. Ultimately, internalized oppression is threatening for all Millennials during their first major socialization experiences into the workforce because if they are working beyond their limits, they might believe this is a norm, and will continue to perform to the higher standard without the compensation. If this is the foundational socialization for Millennials, this initial encounter experience could have long term effects financially and may create burnout and halt social mobility.

Similar to internalized oppression, the narratives revealed that Millennials are subject to corporate colonization (Deetz, 1992). Deetz (1992) suggests that corporations have dominated

the lives of their employees by the commercialization of language, vocationalization of education systems and the restructuring of family life around the demands of work. Corporate colonization coupled with the Millennials' hard work ethic is particularly worrisome for new employees. If a Millennial entering the workforce for the first time is socialized early on to buy into the corporate ideologies that benefit the corporation at the expense of the employee, the young employee will be less aware and resistant of entrenchment from the corporation on their lives. As Millennial employees reach the metamorphosis phase, they may even help perpetuate the corporate colonization as they help to socialize other new employees into the organization.

While it is difficult to resist Corporate Colonization (Deetz, 1992), the Millennials in this study demonstrated a few ways in which their generation uniquely decolonizes themselves from corporate ideology. First, their desire for work/life balance is resistance to the organization. Valuing work/life balance shows that Millennials are unwilling to allow their employer to take first priority in their lives – Millennials put their own mental and physical well-being first. They value their time away from the office as much as their time within the office. However, Millennials ought to be wary of the ways in which organizations can also colonize this value. For example, Bailey stated that she desired "Unlimited Paid Time Off," however, there are caveats to such policies. Through measures like flexible time off, employees are given unlimited amount of time off, with the caveat that they are to still complete their organizational responsibilities. So, for the employee, it gives them the flexibility to take a long lunch one day if they stay late to make sure all the tasks for the day are done. One step further, it could mean taking multiple vacations throughout the year, while still maintaining and making the progresses in their responsibilities as expected by the organizational management. Alternatively, the employee could take a three-day weekend every weekend during the summer. All of these are

variations that would be available to an employee with flexible time off. However, the danger for the employee is that they may end up working the same amount of time or more than they would with a traditional paid-time-off program. Yet now, if the employee does not take the time off, the employee does not get the financial kickback of unused paid time off.

To truly decolonize the individual from corporate colonization, the individual must be completely removed from the system. This is what four of the participants attempted to do when they started their own businesses. Millennial entrepreneurs decided to start their own business to have more "control" over their time and income. Thus, as an entrepreneur, the power of the dominator is shifted from an organizational structure to an individual. The individual at that point is no longer subject to the demands of a corporation that stands to directly benefit from their labor. Entrepreneurs directly benefit from their own labor and can determine their own work schedules.

**Practical Implications**

Taking this research from a theoretical abstraction to an applied context, there are many practical implications for hiring managers, employees of all ages, and young Millennials as they enter the workforce. Understanding a more authentic narrative of Millennials will help improve communication between Millennials and their coworkers/employers. Conversely, Millennials expressing their experiences aids in understanding how to communicate their value to employers. Additionally, hiring managers could benefit greatly from this research to help revise their recruiting and onboarding communicative processes and procedures. Primarily, it is important for hiring managers to recognize the value of Millennial work ethic. Millennials are ready to work hard and eager to communicate their worth to their employers. However, to get the Millennials a seat at the interview table, many hiring managers should revisit job descriptions

and interview processes in an effort to re-evaluate what knowledge, skills, and abilities are truly needed from employees in entry level positions. The qualifications for entry-level jobs seemed to have inflated over time. Hiring managers should avoid inflating required/desired years of experience in their job descriptions and be open to bringing in novice employees that may require slightly more employer-specific training once on the job.

Additionally, as demonstrated in the findings, some Millennials discussed a desire for a slower socialization processes. Hiring and operational managers should consider the ways in which they can help facilitate slower socialization processes for new employees. Employers that regularly recruit new employees from technical schools or universities could provide programs for students to become familiar with the organizations while students are still completing their course work. Then when the employer is ready to bring the new graduate into the organization full time, the student will have had the initial introductions and familiarization completed before starting the work they were hired to do. If a slower socialization process is not possible for a particular industry or organization, the managers can still help Millennials transition into their organization by giving the new employees the benefit of the doubt. Offering new Millennial employees support they need to be successful will give them the opportunities to prove themselves to be the valuable employees they were hired to be.

Moreover, within the workplace, employers and employees should come together to bridge the generation gap between Millennial employees and Gen-X and Baby Boomer employees. As part of the onboarding process for Millennial employees, managers should create opportunities to interact with Gen-X and Baby Boomer employees. This could happen in a variety of forms whether the Millennial employees are added to a team of a mixed generation employees, or simply meeting each of the employees, regardless of age, exposing younger and older employees

to one another will help to build positive working relationships. As employees continue their time with the organization, management should make continued efforts to foster opportunities to build positive relationships across generations either through social outings or through continued collaboration on work.

Millennials entering the workforce should be armed with the knowledge of their worth in the workplace. Universities and professional associations should offer training for Millennials on how to navigate the job search and salary negotiation processes in order to help Millennials understand the dynamics of the modern workplace and longer-term career management (including entrepreneurship), and how to appropriately and effectively advocate for themselves throughout the lifecycle of their career. Millennials who enter the workforce should be intimately aware of what unique skills, knowledge and abilities they can bring to the workplace. When new career professionals are aware of the value they bring to the workplace, it can help them in the job search process to find jobs for which they are qualified and to be more confident in the process of seeking work.

Furthermore, Millennials on the job market should not let their feelings of being "unqualified" prevent themselves from applying for job openings. If a job seems like a good fit with the exception of a few qualifications that can be learned on the job, Millennials should still take the risk and apply for the position. Additionally, knowing one's worth involves understanding the job market, the living wage for a given geographic area, as well as compensation trends for specific industries. This can inform decision-making and promote fair compensation based on one's knowledge, skills, and abilities in a given market. Moreover, Millennials should remember to resist overworking themselves, which is important given the desire to maintain work/life balance.

Finally, Millennials should cultivate relationships to build a strong professional network prior to entering the workforce. Those who were able to use strong or weak tie connections in the job search process had more success and were more confident in their job search process. As digital natives, Millennials are in a unique position to really utilize social media professional networks like LinkedIn to create and cultivate a robust social network. As Millennials prepare to enter the workforce, they should carefully create a professional profile to utilize as they meet and connect with other professionals in person and online.

**Limitations**

Due to the method and participants used for this study, there are a number of limitations for this research. Because interviews are dependent on the dual nature of a conversation to build things together, the quality of the interview is dependent upon the interviewer and interviewee's ability to co-construct a conversation together. Thus, if a participant is not very talkative there is less content for the researcher to analyze, which then limits the richness of the research being done.

While I did my best to recruit equal numbers of participants from blue and white collar work, it became apparent that the white collar workers were much more adept at participating in a verbose interview communication than the blue collar workers. Blue collar interviews were typically between 30-45 minutes. White collar were more 45-90 minutes long. More than twice as long as the blue collar interviews. The interviews where the participant did not offer as long of answers were not featured in the findings because they did not provide as rich examples of the themes (although their experiences were still in line with the themes). One explanation for the discursive differences between the two social classes goes back to the type of work each does. White collar jobs typically rely on text work (Dougherty, 2011) which uses language excessively

in one's daily work. On the other hand, blue collar workers primarily use the corporeal body to accomplish their everyday work (Dougherty, 2011). In other words, white collar workers are more likely to be more highly skilled in using language than blue collar workers by nature of the differences in the work they do. Ultimately, when it comes to qualitative analysis the methodology favors those that talk more than those that are brief, placing a burden of verbosity upon the participants (Gist, 2016b).

One way that seemed to help participants overcome the burden of verbosity (Gist, 2016b) was conducting the interviews over the phone. Participants that were interviewed over the phone were more talkative and typically had longer answers than those that were interviewed face to face. Conducting the interviews over the phone gave the participants some level of anonymity to quickly feel comfortable talking about their experiences at length. It let us build rapport more quickly than in the face-to-face interaction where there was still awkwardness of me as a researcher asking about personal life experiences. To an extent, technology conceals the researcher's identity from the interview conversation, thus any assumptions or hesitations about what they might share with me if they had seen me in person are displaced to only the sound of my voice.

The participant pool offers two limitations to this study. First, the participants were relatively close in age, there was an 8 year age range with 20 being the youngest and 28 being the oldest. Thus, this study only offers a perspective of the young Millennials entering the work force and not a full-range of the Millennial generation. Second, despite a variety of social classes and gender, most participants were white. Only 4 participants identified as part of a minority racial background. Having the majority of white participants is not representative of the general population, while qualitative research does not seek to create generalizations, it still limits the

perspectives shared through the research. While there were not significant differences in narratives across social classes, those that were minorities did talk more about discrimination within the workplace that shaped their socialization process. This is just one example of potential findings that are missing from the data set because it has been whitewashed to some extent. Moreover, one of the goals of this study was to be more representative of the diversity within the Millennial population, which it has only just begun to do. Future research should make a better effort to have a better balance of racial backgrounds for Millennials as they are the most racially diverse generation.

Finally, my position as a researcher is both a contribution and limitation to the research. This research has an emic perspective because I am a Millennial contributing to the research. Thus, I can offer an insider's perspective to the analysis and understanding of the research being done. I had similar experiences to my participants when I entered the workforce, and thus could understand and relate to their stories. However, because of that insider's perspective, I am also limited in my analysis because I may not have the same perspective as an outsider looking in to the data with fresh eyes.

**Future Directions**

From this research, for those interested in Millennial workers I suggest three future directions for research: Millennial entrepreneurs, Millennials marginalized in the workplace, furthering the modified labeling theory (MLT) and Millennial perspectives of other generations. All of these studies suggest similar intersectional approaches extending the work of the current study that explores the nexus of age and social class.

First, I suggest that more research investigate the experiences of Millennial entrepreneurs. Based on this data, the entrepreneurs suggested they had a slightly different

socialization process as they created and established their businesses. While it was similar enough to the others in the data to keep them included with the other traditional worker socialization narratives, they did have some subtle differences because they were creating new businesses rather than joining established ones. With the growing Gig Economy, Millennials may be more inclined to take an entrepreneurial approach to a career rather than the traditional route of joining an established business. Moreover, since my data only included blue collar entrepreneurs, I would suggest this type of research should also include white collar entrepreneurs for comparison to understand how social class influences entrepreneurial socialization processes. Understanding these emerging socialization dynamics and unique circumstances for Millennial entrepreneurs will be useful for understanding the ways in which our future economy will be shaped.

Second, there is much to be understood from the perspectives of marginalized Millennials in the workplaces. As this research relied primarily on the experiences of those who were not racial minorities, furthering the research would next turn to a greater focus on marginalized identities within the workplace. Future research could include race and other marginalized social identities in the workplace as well – i.e. a woman in a male dominated field and vice versa; people of color in high level corporate America, people who have experienced social mobility, first generation college graduates as they transition into the workforce. All of these populations would further nuance the narrative of Millennials in the workforce.

Third, based on the narratives, it would appear that the ways in which Millennials communicate their identities could further the modified labeling theory (MLT). MLT was developed to predict the process of how being labeled as mentally ill influences the behaviors of those who are diagnosed with mental illness (Link, 1982). Using this theoretical model with

Millennials would be useful to understand the implications of negative perceptions of being labeled a Millennial then influences the communicative behaviors of Millennials in the workplace.

Finally, I suggest future research investigate the ways Millennials talk about and with other generations within organizations. As intergenerational communication research continues in the workplace, there's opportunity to have Millennials offer their perspectives of the other generations in the workplace. Millennials are often the focus of current discussions regarding age and work, so flipping it to include a multi-generational perspective could not only give further insight into the assumptions and experiences of Millennials themselves, but also how they will shape the future workforce based on these perspectives of others. This research can also give insight to organizations of how they can bridge generational gaps within their organizations. Overall, it seems as if the study of Millennial workers is a fruitful avenue for advancing organizational communication scholarship.

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# Appendix A

Recruitment Materials

**Email to Recruitment Partners:**

Subject: Millennial Workplace Experiences Study

Dear [administrator],

My name is Abigail Kingsford. I am a graduate student in the KU Department of Communication Studies and am conducting a study as part of my master's thesis. My research will be exploring the personal and occupational experiences of Millennial workers.

I would like to conduct confidential interviews with individuals that have been working for you for at least six months, but no longer than 5 years. Each interview should take between 1 to 1.5 hours. The interviews would be conducted in a private room.

I would really appreciate your help in identifying potential interview participants who would be open to talking to me about their experiences.

Could you please forward the note below to qualifying participants for this study?

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like further information about the study. Thank you for your help and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Abigail Kingsford

**Note to forward to potential participants:**

Hi,

I am conducting a study exploring the personal and occupational experiences of Millennial workers.

To make this happen, I would like you to consider participating in a confidential interview that should take approximately 1 hour. The interview will be conducted in a private room at a day/time of your convenience.

Please note that your decision to participate is completely voluntary. If you would be willing to share your experiences, please contact me using my email addresses listed below and we will schedule a day/time for the interview.

**Email responding to volunteers interested in participating in the study:**

Thank you for your interest in my study. I really appreciate your willingness to participate and look forward to meeting you soon.

Please let me know which of the following times would work best for you to conduct our **1**+ hour interview.
[List days/times availabilities here]

As a reminder, your participation in this study will entail an audio-recorded conversation to discuss your personal and occupational experiences. This interview is confidential. I will reserve a private room conduct the interviews once we find a day/time that best fits our schedule.

Hope you are doing well and we'll be in touch.

Sincerely,
Abigail

**Phone Contact Script**

Hello, my name is Abigail and I was told that you might be interested in participating in my study exploring the personal and occupational experiences of Millennials in the US. This research seeks to understand the unique circumstances influencing Millennials' workplace experiences. You will participate in one audio-recorded interview that will take approximately 1 hour. This interview will be confidential.. Would you be interested in participating?

**Social Media Posts**

**Personal Account Post:**
Research Volunteers Needed!
Looking for participants for a study about Millennial experiences in the workplace.
You qualify if:
- You are at least 18 years of age
-You currently work at least 30 Hrs/Week
- You have been employed for at least 6 months and no more than 5 years
Interviews will last approximately 1-1.5 hours and all answers are confidential. All interviews will be audio-recorded.
Direct message me if you are interested, or email me at AKingsford@ku.edu

**Shareable Post:**
Research Volunteers Needed!
My friend is a graduate student at the University of Kansas and seeking Millennial workers to participate in an interview about their personal and occupational experiences.
You qualify if:
- You are at least 18 years of age
-You currently work at least 30 Hrs/Week
- You have been employed for at least 6 months and no more than 5 years

Interviews will last approximately 1-1.5 hours and all answers are confidential. All interviews will be audio-recorded.

Contact Abigail Kingsford if interested in participating!
Thanks for your consideration!
Email: AKingsford@ ku.edu

**Recruitment Flyer**

- **Front of flyer shares recruitment information and contact information**

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED:

Researchers at the University of Kansas are seeking Millennial workers to participate in an interview about their personal and occupational experiences.

You qualify if:
- You are at least 18 years of age
-You currently work at least 30 Hrs/Week
- You have been employed for at least 6 months and no more than 5 years

Interviews will last approximately 1-1.5 hours and all answers are confidential. All interviews will be audio-recorded.

Contact **Abigail Kingsford** if interested in participating!
Thanks for your consideration!
Email: AKingsford@ ku.edu

Phone: (785) 330 - 5653

## Appendix B

Consent Form

**Researchers**: The primary researcher Abigail N. Kingsford., Graduate Student at University of Kansas, under the direction of Angela N. Gist, PhD, Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, as part of a Master's thesis project.

**Purpose:** We are conducting this study to better understand Millennial generation's workforce entry experiences.

The following qualifications should be met by all participants: (1) be at least 18 years of age, (2) been employed for at least 6 months, but no longer than 5 years, (3) work at least 30hrs/week. Your participation entails completing an audio recorded interview with the primary researcher and filling out a short demographic questionnaire. You may also be asked to give feedback on the analysis later in the process. You may choose to participate in that phase of the research as well but are under no obligation to do so.

**Time:** In total, participation should take between 45 to 90 minutes, depending on how much you choose to participate and on what you have to say. The interview conversation will be audio taped.

**Voluntary**: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time and you may refuse to answer any question without consequence.

**Risk:** There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions.

**Benefits:** The results of this study may help to promote understanding about the daily experiences of Millennial workers from various social classes.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will not be revealed in written or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity

1. Consent forms will be separated from the data.
2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from transcripts and any reporting of the data.
3. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym of your choosing on transcripts to further protect your identity.
4. You can refuse to answer any question asked.
5. Audio files will be password protected.

**Refusal to sign consent and authorization:** You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

**Canceling this consent and authorization:** *Be sure to consider the length of time the data will be collected and include whether you will use information that was collected prior to the participant's cancellation of permission. For example:* You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study, we will ask you if we can use the information we have collected about you up to your withdrawal or if not, please inform us that you want us to discard that information.

**Audio Recording Consent:** This study will involve audio recording. Audio recording is required to participate in the study. If you do not agree to audio recording you can voluntarily withdraw from this study. In addition, participation can be stopped at any point during the interview. Audio files may be transcribed by a paid transcriptionist who will have access to the audio files for a limited period of time. The paid transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the files. Once transcripts are completed and approved by the researcher, the paid transcriptionist will erase their copy of the audio files within 30 days of completing the transcription. The researcher(s) will have access to both audio files and transcripts of the focus group. The researchers will keep transcripts indefinitely and audio recordings for up to 1 year after the analysis is complete.

Please initial one of the two following statements:

____ I agree to have this interview audio-recorded and maintain the right to stop recording at any time.

____ I do not agree to have this interview audio-recorded and I withdraw from this study.

**Participant certification:** I have read this consent and authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

_____ _____

Type/Print Participant's Name Date

_____

Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information

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## Appendix C

Demographic Survey

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your gender? _____
3. Are you currently employed? _____
4. If you are employed, what is your current occupation? _____
    a. How many days per week do you work? _____
    b. How many hours per day do you work? _____
    c. Is your work temporary or permanent? _____
5. If you are not employed, what was your previous occupation? _____
6. What your most recent salary/compensation? _____
7. What is your total household income? _____
8. How many people currently reside in your household? _____
9. How long have you been employed by your current employer? _____
10. If you're searching for work, what kind of work are you looking for? _____
11. Racial/Ethnic Identity - please circle all categories that you would use to describe yourself:
    - American Indian / Native American
    - Asian
    - Black / African American
    - Hispanic / Latino
    - White/Caucasian
    - Other: _____
12. What is your current marital status? _____
13. Have you ever been married? _____
14. What is your spouse's occupation? _____
15. How many dependents (i.e. children) do you have? _____
16. What is your highest level of completed education_____

17. What is your living situation (i.e. rent, homeowner, etc.)? _____

18. How many bedrooms are in your current home? _____

19. What's your primary mode of transportation? _____

20. Do you own a vehicle? If so, how many? _____

## Appendix D

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

The primary researcher Abigail N. Kingsford., Graduate Student at University of Kansas, under the direction of Angela N. Gist, PhD, Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, as part of a Master's thesis project. We are conducting this study to better understand Millennial generation's workforce entry experiences. Participants have been assured that the interview data will remain confidential. No identifying information will be included in the audio-files or transcripts.

I, _____, the transcriber, agree to:

1. keep all information confidential by not discussing or sharing research information in any form or format (e.g., audio recordings, transcripts, names of participants) with anyone other than the researcher.

2. keep all research information secure while in my possession, including audio recordings, transcripts, disks, or any other research information.

3. return all research information in any form or format when the research tasks are completed, including audio recordings, transcripts, disks, or any other research information.

4. after consulting with the researcher, I will erase or destroy all research information I have remaining in any form or format regarding this project that is not returnable to the researcher. This includes information stored on a computer hard drive.

_____

Name (printed)

_____

Signature

_____

Date

## Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Date/Time of Interview: _____
Place of Interview: _____
Interview Facilitator(s): _____
Participant Pseudonym: _____
**PURPOSE STATEMENT:** This research seeks to better understand the workforce entry experiences of millennials.

**Before interview:** Please pick a pseudonym that you can go by. This is to protect your identity by keeping it confidential.

Focus Group Questions

Anticipatory Socialization: Job Search Process

1. How did you find your first full-time job? Tell me about the process you went through to get hired.
    a. What was the most enjoyable part of this process?
    b. What was the stressful part of this process?
2. What was going on in your life when you were interviewing for this position?
3. How long did the process take to find a job?
4. How did you feel about yourself during the job search?
5. What, if anything, did you know about this organization/job before you were hired?
6. What made this job attractive to you before you accepted the position?
7. What made you interested in this job/industry?
8. Was there anyone that was influential to you choosing this job? Tell me how he/she/they influenced you.
9. Could you tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you got your job offer?
    a. Was the offer what you expected in terms of salary and benefits?
    b. Did you negotiate any of these things? Why or Why not?
10. What were the employer's expectations of the job?
    a. How did your employer communicate expectations of what the job would entail?
11. What were your expectations about what this job would be?

Encounter: New Employee Experience

1. Think back to your first 90 days of work. Tell me what it was like to be a new employee at your organization.
    a. What did the organization do to help prepare you for this position?
    b. Were there any other experiences you had (training, previous jobs, education) that helped to make this transition simpler?
    c. Was there anything that was especially helpful for you during the first week/month?
    d. If you could go back and do it over, what do you wish you would've known then that you know now?
2. As you look back on your time becoming a full-time working person, tell me a story about an event that stand out in your mind?
    a. Could you describe it? How did this event affect your employment experience? How did you respond to_____[the event; resulting situations]? How did you feel about it?

   b. Examples – first time you had praise, solved a difficult problem, were reprimanded, witnessed a conflict
3. Who has been the most helpful during this time? How has he/she/they been helpful to you?
4. What advice would you give to someone looking to take a similar job to yours?
5. When did you feel like you could take ownership of your position?
6. How did you know this position was (or was not) a good fit for you?
7. Was this job what you expected? Why or why not?

Encounter: Stress & Coping

1. What stress or struggles did you/have you experienced at this job? What stress or struggles have you experienced in your personal life?
   a. Do you think this has affected your job or your performance?

2. How do you deal with stress in your life?

Metamorphosis: Desired Work Experience/Qualifications

1. Is there another type of work that you would you like to do?
   a. If so, what type?
   b. If no, why not?
2. What attributes do you want in your in future positions?
   a. (i.e. Pay, Healthcare benefits, Full time hours, work/lifebalance)
   b. (i.e. dignity, respect, sustainable financial security)
3. If you could change anything about your current job, what would you like to change?
4. Tell me about your education/training?
   a. Would you be interested in attaining additional training and certification if it helped you move into a better job?
      i. If so, what keeps you from seeking additional training or certification??
5. If you would like additional training, what interests you most?
6. Where do you see yourself in 2 years?
   a. Describe the type of person and job you hope to be/have then.
   b. How would you compare your current self and what you hope to be?

Closing

Those are all the questions I have for you. Do you think there's anything else important that I need to know? Would it be okay if I e-mailed or called you to follow up with any further questions? I really appreciate your time.

## Appendix F

Demographic Information

*Table 1: White Collar Participants*

| Pseudonym | Age | Race | Occupation | Salary | Tenure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Charlie | 25 | White | Asst. Director of Career Development | $45,000 | 6 months |
| David | 24 | White | Call Center Trainer | $16/hr | 1 year, 9 months |
| Trevon | 28 | White | Business Consultant | $105,000 | 3 years |
| William | 25 | Hispanic/Latino | Staffing Manager | $39,000 | 1 year, 2 months |
| Talbot | 28 | White | Programmatic Ad Operations | $42,000 | 2 years, 6 months |
| Aubrey | 22 | White | Account Manager | $33,000 | 8 months |
| Bailey | 24 | White | Strategic Partnership Representative | $50,000 | 6 months |
| Amanda | 26 | White | Community Partnerships Coordinator | $37,900 | 2 years, 7 months |
| JoAnn | 26 | White | Advocacy/Lobbying | $48,000 | 6 months |
| Lucy | 25 | White | Development Coordinator | $40,000 | 2 years |

*Table 2: Blue Collar Participants*

| Pseudonym | Age | Race | Occupation | Salary | Tenure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tina | 26 | Pacific Islander | Cosmetologist/Salon Manager | $35,000 | 6 months |
| Jocelyn | 23 | White | Master Esthetician & Lash Artist, Self-Employed | $35,000 | 1 year, 9 months |
| Sandra | 23 | Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American | Package Handler | $10.30/Hr | 3 years |
| Millie | 25 | White | Esthetician/Lash Artist, Self-Employed | $75/Hr | 1 year, 2 months |
| Lindsey | 24 | White | House Cleaner/Business Owner | $34,200 | 2 years, 6 months |
| Sheldon | 23 | White | Carpet Cleaning & Power Washing, Self-Employed | $7-8,000/ Monthly | 8 months |
| Dexter | 20 | Native American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, White | Meat Department Associate | $14/Hr | 6 months |
| Jerry | 28 | White | Electrician | $21.50/Hr | 2 years, 7 months |
| Max | 25 | White | Mechanic | $27,000 | 6 months |
| Powell | 23 | White | Service Electrician | $12/Hr | 2 years |